The New Criterion

A monthly review *edited by Hilton Kramer*

A note on *The New Criterion*, 1
The literary life today *by Joseph Epstein*, 6
Berlin 1928 *by Elias Canetti*, 16
Postmodern: the 1980s *by Hilton Kramer*, 36
F.R. Leavis: a revaluation *by Norman Podhoretz*, 43
Enclosures: Barbara Pym *by Hortense Calisher*, 53

Music: American opera *by Samuel Lipman*, 57; **Architecture:** The new museum *by William H. Jordy*, 61; **Art:** The Eakins retrospective *by Hilton Kramer*, 66

Books: *Simone de Beauvoir* La cérémonie des adieux *reviewed by Frederick Brown*, 70; *Richard Reeves* American journey *reviewed by Robert Nisbet*, 76; *Jim M. Jordan and Robert Goldwater* The paintings of Arshile Gorky: a critical catalogue *reviewed by E.V. Thaw*, 82; **Notebook:** Calder's no-fault 'Circus,' 87

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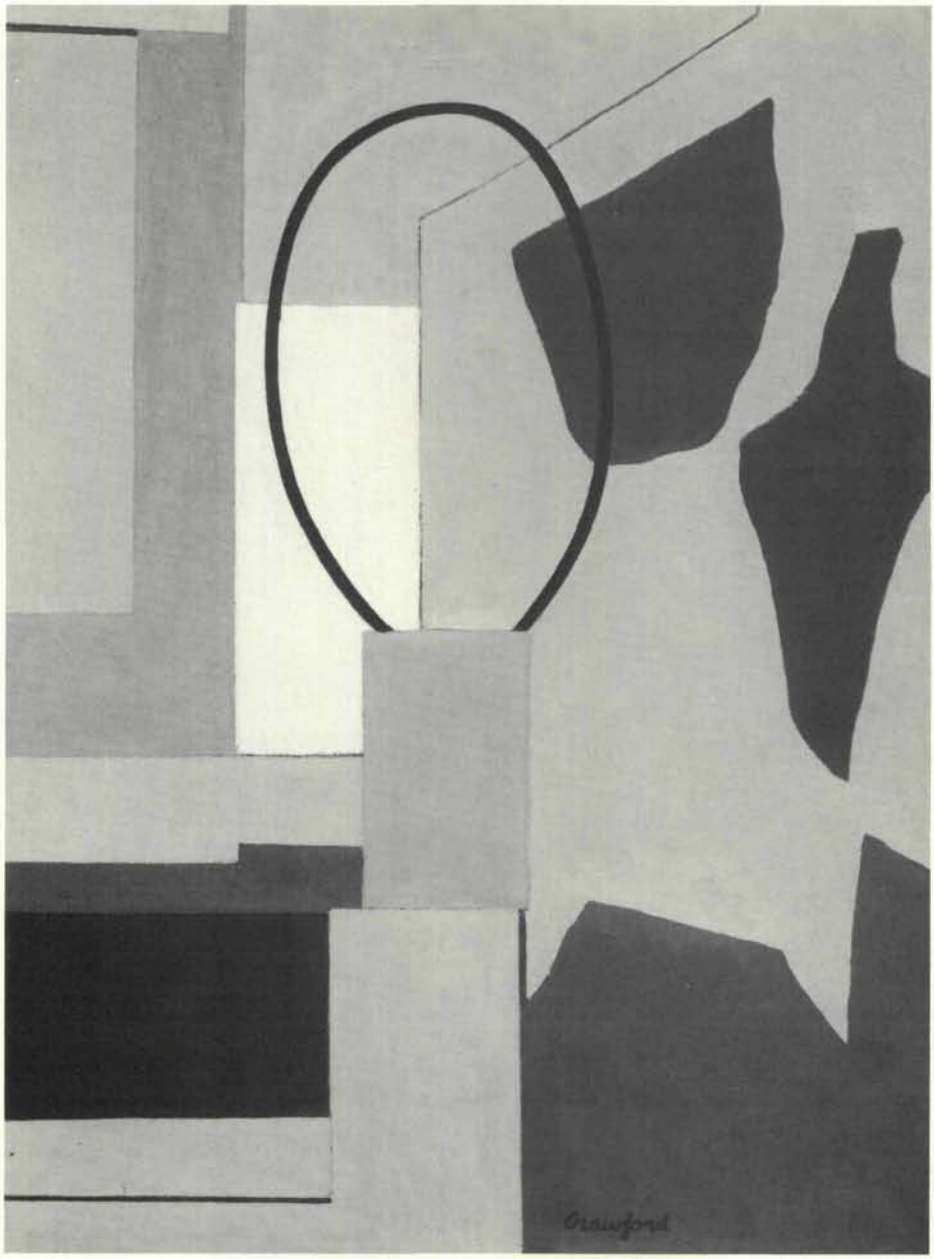

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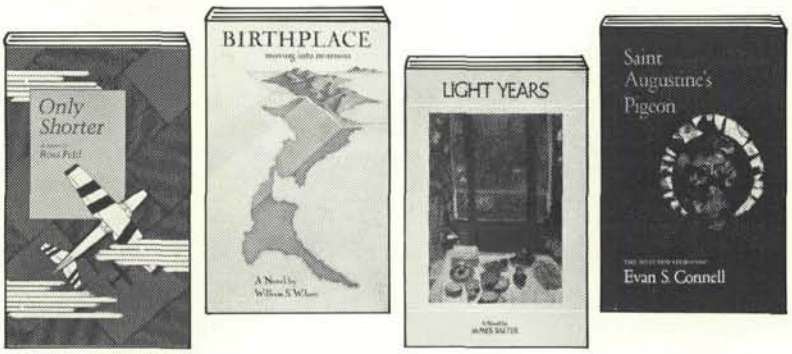

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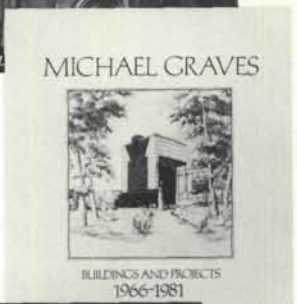

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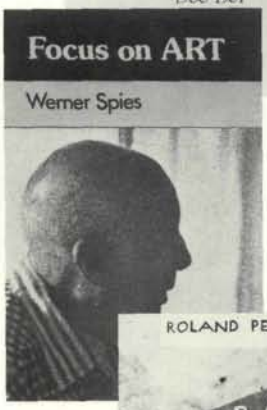

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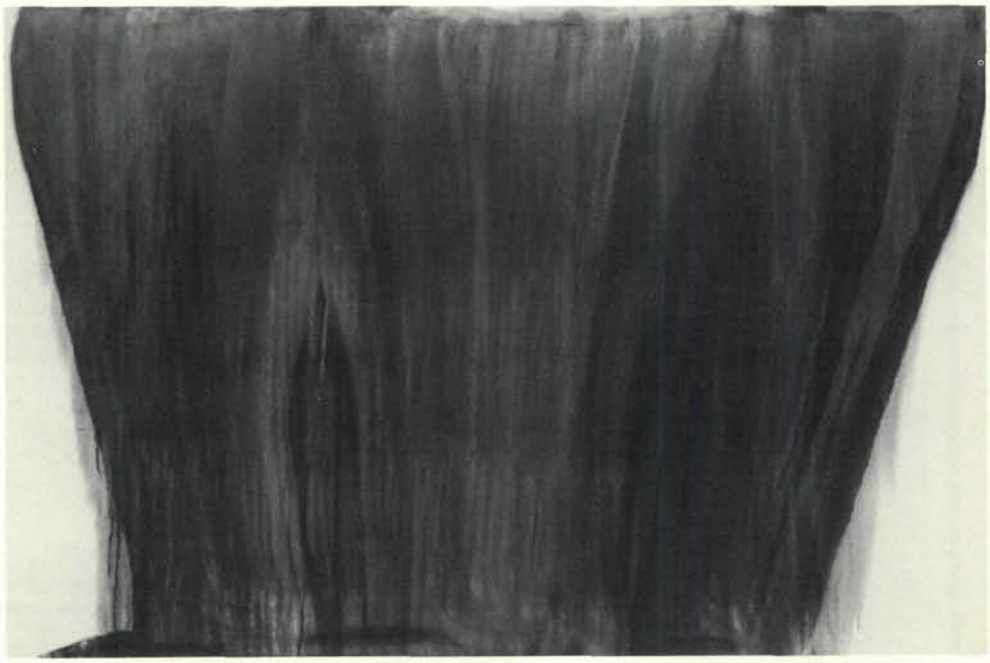

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A note on *The New Criterion*

There are no doubt many reasons for wanting to start a new review, but the primary one was long ago stated with exemplary candor by Sir Walter Scott while he was involved in preparations for launching *The Quarterly Review*. Writing to Gifford in October 1808, on the eve of the *Quarterly*'s initial appearance, Scott declared that "The real reason for instituting the new publication is the disgusting and deleterious doctrines with which the most popular of our Reviews disgraces its pages." The journal Scott had in mind was, of course, the *Edinburgh Review*. But he—fortunate man!—lived in a tidier and more fastidious intellectual universe than ours. Today we know to our sorrow that there are many worse disasters to be visited upon the life of culture than the *Edinburgh Review*. We are surrounded by the evidence wherever we turn. The feeling of dissatisfaction with existing journals, and with the ideas and practices that govern them, is therefore likely to be especially acute just now for anyone capable of recalling a time when criticism was more strictly concerned to distinguish achievement from failure, to identify and uphold a standard of quality, and to speak plainly and vigorously about the problems that beset the life of the arts and the life of the mind in our society.

Today, more often than not, the prevailing modes of criticism have not only failed to come to grips with such tasks, they have actually come to constitute an obstacle to their pursuit. A multitude of journals of every size and periodicity—quarterlies, monthlies, fortnightlies, weeklies, and even the daily papers to the extent that they concern themselves with matters of the mind—lavishes upon the life of culture a vast amount of attention. Yet most of what is written in these journals is either hopelessly ignorant, deliberately obscurantist, commercially compromised, or politically motivated. Especially where the fine arts and the disciplines of high culture are concerned, criticism at every level—from the daily newspaper review of a concert or a novel to the disquisitions of critics and scholars in learned journals—has almost everywhere degenerated into one or another form of ideology or publicity or some pernicious combination of the two. As a result, the very notion of an independent high culture and the distinctions that separate it from popular culture and commercial entertainment have been radically eroded. Far from resisting this erosion, criticism has lately been responsible for hastening it on its downward course. Not only have our critics assisted in blurring the kinds of distinctions that were once fundamental to their vocation. In many cases they have openly celebrated the demise of such distinctions.

This fateful collapse in critical standards—and in the very idea of critical disinterestedness—is only a part, of course, of a more general cultural drift that has brought some woeful consequences in its wake. It has changed, and changed very much for the worse, the way the arts and the humanities

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are now studied in our universities. It has changed the way art museums and other cultural institutions now conceive of their programs and priorities—and indeed, the very reason for their existence. It plays a role in the way government agencies, private foundations, and corporate sponsors dispense funds for cultural projects. In many cases it has condemned true seriousness to a fugitive existence even in realms, such as the world of scholarship, where it was once highly prized. It has thus altered the conditions of artistic and intellectual life in this country, and made it infinitely more difficult for the voice of informed intelligence to make itself heard, and almost impossible for it to prevail.

A very large part of the reason for this sad state of affairs is, frankly, political. We are still living in the aftermath of the insidious assault on mind that was one of the most repulsive features of the radical movement of the Sixties. The cultural consequences of this leftward turn in our political life have been far graver than is commonly supposed. In everything from the writing of textbooks to the reviewing of trade books, from the introduction of kitsch into the museums to the decline of literacy in the schools to the corruption of scholarly research, the effect on the life of culture has been ongoing and catastrophic. Yet the subject is one that has scarcely been studied. It would probably take the combined talents of a Gibbon and a Tocqueville to tell the whole shabby story on the requisite scale, but one does not have to be a genius to recognize some of the more egregious results of this flight from intelligence and intellectual scruple. The cultural landscape is littered with its casualties and debris.

Consider, for example, what now passes for the writing of contemporary art history in the offices of the Oxford University Press in New York:

> When the Philip Morris Company sponsored a concert of Arnold Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* to accompany the Guggenheim [Museum's] presentation [of German Expressionist painting], the musical director included a parody of *Pierrot Lunaire* composed by Hanns Eisler, a former student of Schoenberg's who had fled Nazi Germany in 1933, worked in Hollywood as musical assistant to Charlie Chaplin, and was so savagely persecuted as a Communist that he was forced to flee America in 1947 during the worst of the red witch hunts. Eisler's brilliant parody, composed to the poems of another rebellious German, Christian Morgenstern, went unnoticed by both the corporation and those reporting the event. But while the directors of museums insist that the benign supercompanies never attempt to influence judgments in high artistic matters, had Philip Morris only known . . .

The knowing ellipsis is in the original, by the way, which is to be found in the closing pages of Dore Ashton's recently published *American Art Since 1945,* a book clearly intended for classroom use. Apparently we are to regard the life of art in the United States as existing under some kind of dire political threat from big business—even when big business does *not* interfere in the artistic activities it sponsors. No wonder a reviewer in *The Nation,* though he found *American Art Since 1945* to be neither "a brilliant [n] or a profound text," praised its author for seeing "art as a political as well as an esthetic activity."

Needless to say, it is never explained why it is right and proper for Hanns Eisler, Dore Ashton, and reviewers in *The Nation* to see "art as a political as well as an esthetic activity" while it is somehow wrong—and indeed sinister—for corporate patrons of the arts to evince the least curiosity about the social implications of the artistic programs they are invited to sponsor. Incidentally, nowhere in *American Art Since 1945* is it pointed out that Hanns Eisler, after he left the United States in 1947, went on to become the privileged composer laureate of the Communist regime in East Germany that, among much else, built the Berlin Wall. Opinions will differ as to whether an account of a career like Eisler's even belongs in a history of American art since 1945. But if it is to be included, does there not exist some elementary obligation to the reader—who, more often than not, is

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likely to be a student without any detailed knowledge of the period—to tell the whole story?

Elsewhere the tendency to substitute political fantasies for the writing of art history has become even more programmatic. Thus, in a journal called *Art History* (September 1980) we find the following contribution to historical enlightenment. The authors—Fred Orton and Griselda Pollock of the University of Leeds—are discussing the mammoth "Post-Impressionism" exhibition mounted at the Royal Academy in London in 1979-1980 and afterwards shown, in somewhat modified form, at the National Gallery in Washington. They are particularly concerned to discredit John Rewald's definitive *Post-Impressionism: From Van Gogh to Gauguin,* published by the Museum of Modern Art in 1956 and still the most comprehensive study of its subject today. This is what they say about it:

> Those of us who are neither indebted to Rewald nor convinced of the possibility or desirability of writing definitive histories do, however, believe that it is important to note the historical specificity of the reassertion of 'Post-Impressionism' in Rewald's view of history, the date of the book's publication (1956), the institution which published it (Museum of Modern Art, New York), and the *dramatis personae* acknowledged as Trustees of the Museum of Modern Art (1950s hegemonists, power elitists and upper class Americans with interests in shaping foreign policy). Rewald's *The History of Impressionism* (New York, 1946) and *Post-Impressionism* must be recognized for what they are, symptoms of, and contributions to, the construction of a history of art from the mid-nineteenth century to the present which was conceived by that Cold War warrior and ideologue Alfred H. Barr Jr., Director of the Museum of Modern Art. Rewald's conception of the history of art fits snugly into Barr's grand design, modernism, into that creation of an autonomous linear development which obfuscates the changing conditions of production in art practices and the real social relations in which they are embedded in favour of those abstractions, style and genius.

And while our authors modestly acknowledge that this article "is not the place to begin the deconstruction of modernism as one of the corner-stones of American cultural imperialism," in a footnote we are promised "a historical study of Alfred H. Barr and the role of the Museum of Modern Art in the construction of modernism" for the future.

It would be comforting, perhaps, to suppose that such manifest and malevolent misrepresentations of art, of history, of scholarship, and of the institutions that have been created in democratic societies to secure their integrity, are isolated or eccentric occurrences on the cultural scene today. But such, alas, is not the case. For more than a decade now there has been an active school of criticism at work promoting the notion that the New York School, for example, was little more than a political instrument conjured up by those "1950s hegemonists" for the purpose of fighting the Cold War. This line was introduced into criticism by the English Marxist writer John Berger in the Fifties, when the paintings of Pollock, Rothko, de Kooning, et al. were first exhibited in Europe on a large scale and began to exert a tremendous influence on the rising generation of artists there. It was not taken seriously on this side of the Atlantic, however, until the political shifts of the Sixties created an intellectual environment more conducive to its reception. Since that time, Berger's own writings have acquired a cult status in this country, and there have been some notable conversions to the same Marxist line by critics and scholars who once knew better.

One of the saddest of many such cases is that of the critic Lucy Lippard. Here is a writer who began her career in the Fifties as a serious student of modern art, and went on to produce important monographs on the work of Eva Hesse and Ad Reinhardt and valuable anthologies of the writings of the Dadaists and the Surrealists. There was every reason to suppose that a writer of this quality would one day become one of our leading historians of the modern movement. Yet in the Seventies Miss Lippard fell victim to the

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radical whirlwind. The scholarship and discrimination that won her the respect of the art world is a thing of the past. Nowadays, she writes in defense of ideas that, if triumphant, would require all her earlier work to be placed under a permanent political ban.

This, to be sure, is an extreme case. The descent into straight-out political propaganda is not usually so crude. But the same ideological impulse can be observed, too, in the realm of academic scholarship. It is by no means confined to the world of *révolté* journalism. At Harvard University, for example, the study of nineteenth-century French art history—still the fulcrum of any systematic study of the whole modern period—is now presided over by the English Marxist scholar T.J. Clark, the author of two influential texts, *Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the Second French Republic, 1848-1851* and *The Absolute Bourgeois: Artists and Politics in France, 1848-1851*.[1]

In the literary world, similar political distortions are now so commonplace that they defy easy summary. Not since the 1930s have so many orthodox leftist pieties so casually insinuated themselves into both the creation and the criticism of literature, and remained so immune to resistance or exposure.

Part of this is, of course, sheer trendiness. Writers seeking readers' favor inevitably—and not always very thoughtfully—tend to conform to whatever views seem at the moment to be "in." They merely follow where the fashion seems to lead. But how, then, are we to account for a trend that elevates such views to a position of unquestioned modishness? What it seems to come down to is a fervent wish on the part of many writers to dissociate themselves from the capitalist society in which we live. Everything in their intellectual upbringing has disposed them to identify the literary vocation with the conventions of radical criticism, and thus made them acutely vulnerable to the pressure exerted by the special political intensities of the Left.

Many writers on the Left—and this includes a good many of our prominent critics, too—have never forgiven history for failing to conform to the fictions of radical prophecy. They have never forgiven American society for failing to live up to their critique of it. In some tender sanctum of the soul, socialism remains their moral and social ideal—but a socialism so immune to historical contingency and moral reality that it is now indistinguishable from a religious dogma. It would therefore break their hearts and shatter every illusion they have inherited from the sacred traditions of radicalism to have to acknowledge that capitalism, for all its many flaws, has proved to be the greatest safeguard of democratic institutions and the best guarantee of intellectual and artistic freedom—including *their* intellectual and artistic freedom—that the modern world has given us. How profoundly they despise this elementary fact of their existence, and how energetically they work to disguise and distort its reality!

The time has surely come for criticism to turn its back on this intellectual vaudeville act, which wears a fancy radical face when performing for the public while at the same time—backstage, as it were—availing itself of all the advantages and preferments that our society offers in such abundance. It is time to apply a new criterion to the discussion of our cultural life—a criterion of truth. This is by no means a simple or an easy task. The defense of high art in a democratic society has never been a simple or an easy task. It is in the very nature of democracy, with its multiplicity of interests and tastes,

1 Something of the flavor of Professor Clark's outlook may be gleaned from the following exercise in translation. In a passage (page 171) in *The Absolute Bourgeois*, first published in 1973 and lately reprinted in paperback, he writes of Baudelaire: "The revolution [of 1848] would destroy his family, so Baudelaire hoped. Hence the famous slogan he shouted in February, clutching his looted flintlock: *'Il faut fusiller le général Aupick!'* (equals, roughly, 'Up against the wall Motherfucker')." Translation is a notoriously inexact science, of course. It allows a writer many liberties. But there is obviously something more than the creative interpolation of a text at work in this particular effort.

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for the task to be difficult. Yet it is imperative that we recognize, as the first condition for any serious criticism of the arts in the contemporary world, that it is now only in a democratic society like ours that the values of high art can be expected to survive and prosper. The dishonesties and hypocrisies and disfiguring ideologies that nowadays afflict the criticism of the arts are deeply rooted in both our commercial and our academic culture. They govern much that is written about the arts in the media, and much that is taught about them in the classroom. For all practical purposes, indeed, they constitute a very large part of the mainstream of our cultural life today. It is therefore all the more urgent that a dissenting critical voice be heard, and it is for the purpose of providing such a voice that *The New Criterion* has been created. —*The Editors*

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The literary life today

by Joseph Epstein

Assuming for the moment that something called literary culture exists in the United States, where, exactly, might it be found today? From sea to shining sea, I suppose the answer is, but before putting one's hat over one's heart and finishing the song perhaps one would do well to ponder the significance of having to ask the question in the first place. Thirty, fifty, a hundred, a hundred and twenty years ago the question of where literary culture could be found would not need to have been raised, for the answer, though it might differ from time to time, was always evident.

The whereabouts of literary culture in August 1860 was certainly not a serious question for William Dean Howells. Then still a young newspaperman from Columbus, Ohio, Howells checked in at the Tremont Hotel in Boston. Howells had had four poems published in *The Atlantic Monthly,* and now had set himself up to see literary culture firsthand. Literary culture in 1860 meant Boston, where, as Edward Weeks put it in his recent memoirs, "most of the best writers in America lived within thirty miles of the Massachusetts State House."

In *Literary Friends and Acquaintances,* Howells recalled what the literary culture of Boston looked and felt like. His first call was on James Russell Lowell, then the editor of *The Atlantic Monthly,* who treated him with great kindness and gave him a note recommending him to Nathaniel Hawthorne. Lowell also set up a dinner for Howells at the Parker House, at which the young Middle-westerner met the publisher James T. Fields (of the firm of Ticknor & Fields) and Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr. At one point during the dinner Holmes, looking from Lowell to Howells, remarked, "Well, James, this is something like the apostolic succession; this is the laying on of hands."

Later, using his letter from Lowell, Howells paid a call on Hawthorne, who treated him most agreeably, then passed him along to Emerson with a card on which he had scribbled, "I find this young man worthy." Howells met Emerson, then Thoreau, then Longfellow, and eventually nearly every other figure of importance in the burgeoning American literary culture. In time, of course, Howells himself became the editor of *The Atlantic Monthly,* where, notable for the catholicity of his taste, he published and promoted the careers of Mark Twain and Henry James, respectively the ultimate Redskin and Paleface of American literature. When, in 1885, Howells left *The Atlantic Monthly* to become editor of *Harper's* in New York, it was said that the center of literary culture in this country moved too, from Boston to New York, where it has since remained.

But has it? For a long stretch it seems to have done, with occasional lapses. Early in this century Chicago set out claims to be the literary capital of the United States—Theodore Dreiser, Sherwood Anderson, and Carl Sandburg were working there at the time—and H.L. Mencken said that nearly everything of interest in American writing origi-

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nated in Chicago. Mencken himself never lived in New York, but commuted from Baltimore while editing first *The Smart Set,* then *The American Mercury.* In the early 1920s American literary culture kept a home office in Greenwich Village and a flourishing European branch in Paris (send mail c/o Gertrude Stein, 27 rue de Fleurus). In some rough sense, New York remained the scene and center of literary life in this country through World War II and beyond. Sometimes this literary culture seemed rather thin, as in the instance of the characters who gathered round the Algonquin Hotel dining room and who were in any case not strictly literary but part of the New York worlds of theater and smart journalism. Later, in the persons of the *Partisan Review* crowd, literary life would become scruffier and more political and intellectual than strictly literary, but a magazine such as *Partisan Review* seems impossible outside New York.

Even at the best of its literary time, New York was never absolutely indispensable to the national literature in the way that London and Paris have been indispensable to the literature of England and France over the past two centuries. Still, New York until very recently exerted a powerful attraction upon provincial young Americans aflame with literary ambitions. In his essay "My Lost City," F. Scott Fitzgerald, himself precisely such a provincial, recalled sighting from the back seat of his taxi the young Edmund Wilson, "nourished," as Fitzgerald put it, by "the Metropolitan spirit." Manhattan was the name of Fitzgerald's desire, and even today its expense, cumbrousness, and sheer weight in aggravations do not deter a great many young literary men and women whose notions of a literary life are inseparable from life in New York.

Yet one is hard-pressed to think of the names of New York writers. After one has named Norman Mailer, added after thinking a bit about it Donald Barthelme, one descends to journalists and critics. Part of the reason is that New York is not always the best place for a writer to get work done. It remains a nice place for writers to visit their editors and publishers, in the hope of having their wallets fattened and vanities fed. But the great names in New York literary life today are those not of writers but of cultural middlemen—agents, publishers, editors, people with such names as Scott Meredith, Robert Gottlieb, Tom Congdon. Literarily, New York seems increasingly to belong to them.

If I have dwelt so long on Boston and New York, it is only because when one thinks of literary culture, as of culture generally, one thinks (as anthropologists have taught us to think) of a network of institutions, roles, traditions, rituals, and not least of settings. But writers today, more so than ever before, do not live in a single setting or even in two or three primary settings. Major and minor, younger and older, American writers are strewn across the land. Publishing houses, most of them, are still in New York, with a few in Boston and a few others in Chicago and northern California. The majority of magazines that writers care most about appearing in are still in New York, and all the powerful literary agents are there. New York is where writing is most intensely talked about; it is where reputations are pumped up, also deflated. It is, beyond dispute, the mecca of literary publicity. Yet the attractions of New York to the young are no longer what they once were. Indeed, all that the very young may nowadays think of in connection with the literary life is that it has to do with being photographed for *People* and appearing at some point on the *Today Show.*

Economics has a great deal to do with the lessening attraction of New York, and with radical changes in literary culture generally. One of the great problems for a young writer is how he is to get from, say, age twenty-two to age thirty. Literary talent needs time to ripen. Although there are instances of writers doing splendid things in their early twenties—Turgenev wrote *A Sportsman's Notebook* at twenty-three, Rimbaud was even more famously precocious, and, closer to our time, Delmore Schwartz turned out his best poetry before he was thirty—most writers do not burst so brilliantly out of the starting gate.

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The question then becomes what can they do until they are ready to do their best.

Living through this incubation period was once much easier than it is currently. The novelist Albert Halper, now in his seventies, has recently recounted his early days as a writer come from Chicago to New York. He more than once refers to how cheaply he lived. "My total weekly living expenses," Halper recalls, "ran around eight dollars, including rent." That was in the Thirties, of course. But even as late as the 1960s a young writer could make do on fairly little. I not long ago talked about this with Frank Conroy, in whose past I had noted an eight-year gap, a time during which he was evidently preparing to write his autobiography, *Stop-Time*. It turns out that Conroy had a small inheritance from his grandmother, of two hundred dollars a month: he was able to live in New York largely on that. Today in New York two hundred dollars might cover monthly cab and subway costs.

Without an inheritance, a working husband or wife, or the unusual good fortune of an early-blooming talent, getting from age twenty-two to age thirty has never been all that easy. But there were, formerly, more places to lay low while the years passed. Europe for one. Not only did living abroad offer a young writer the opportunity to widen his own culture, but he could until recently depend upon doing so on the cheap, thanks to the powerful position of the American dollar. And if Europe wasn't one's dish of tea, in more recent years there was always that four-to-six-year continuous summer camp known as graduate school. Graduate school was thought to be a good place to hide out for would-be writers with no place else to go. But no longer. The grant money is not there when one starts out, the jobs aren't there when one finishes, and the idea was probably a bad one in the first place. Many writers who hang around universities too long learn one skill above all—self-loathing.

Whether a writer is young or old, it remains difficult to earn a living writing, or, at any rate, writing what one wishes to write. In the summer of 1981 a largely statistical report was put together by the Center for Social Sciences at Columbia University. The most notable finding was that, on the average, American writers earned less than $5,000 a year. In publishing circles, there was a small flap about this report; a small flap, in publishing circles, usually means a not very readable article in *Publisher's Weekly,* which in this instance contested the accuracy of the Columbia study. I would contest it, too. I think the figure is too high. (The *Publisher's Weekly* article thought it was too low.) Surely it is too high if one includes poets, for the only serious American poet in this century said to have been able to live off his poetry was Robert Frost. Even so famous a poet as W.H. Auden had to depend on journalism and poetry readings for his livelihood—not poetry. The great majority of poets of reputation today—Anthony Hecht, Richard Wilbur, A.R. Ammons—have depended on regular teaching jobs for theirs.

Among serious writers generally—"I am speaking here of writers who treat of great subjects," Schopenhauer remarks in his essay "On Authorship," "not of writers on the art of making brandy"—I would guess that there are not many more than two hundred who are able to make their living primarily from their writing. This is not to say that there are not many more men and women justified in calling themselves writers; but these men and women will, I suspect, be found to be drawing the bulk of their incomes from activities auxiliary to literature: from teaching, from lecturing and reading, from editorial work of one kind or another. Despite news of great financial scores for writers—seven-figure paperback sales, movie deals, etc.—contemporary literature in the United States has an economic profile rather like that of a typical Latin American country: a few very rich people at the top, scarcely any middle class, and a vast peasantry.

That not many writers can make their living through writing alone is important, even crucial, because the economy of literature has sent many writers into university jobs—at least those writers who are fortunate enough

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to land such jobs. This, concomitantly, has thinned out New York as the literary capital of the United States. The center of literary life today is the university. Which university? No one university, or even no five or six universities, but merely "the university." Which is a roundabout way of saying that the center of literary life today does not exist except in an attenuated and abstract form. It is a center without a center.

Over roughly the past thirty years the greatest single change in literary life in this country has been the gradual usurpation of literature by the university. Not only are the majority of writers—novelists, poets, critics—today at work in universities, but contemporary writing is increasingly becoming part of the regular university literary curriculum. The consequences of this are mixed. On the one hand, the university has run a very effective employment service—a WPA program that goes by the name of creative-writing classes—for writers who might otherwise have had to go into the mail-order business. This much—and it is no small thing—the university has done for writers. Whether this has been good for writing is another question altogether.

Universities seem tolerable enough places for poets, so many of whom live, literarily, in their imaginations. Much less do universities seem so for novelists, who need to live more in the world if their work is to deal with anything beyond fornication and fashionable ideas, which seem to be the chief forms of experience and knowledge available at contemporary universities. But a great many contemporary novels do not deal with anything beyond fornication and fashionable ideas, of course; and one of the new phenomena in the literary culture of our day is what I think of as the English Department Novel. Written by such writers as Jonathan Baumbach and Ronald Sukenik, and at its higher reaches by John Barth, this is the kind of novel that no one outside an English department would for a moment consider reading.

Critics may at first glimpse seem more naturally a part of the university, yet it was not always so. As recently as the 1920s, critics—certainly critics of contemporary literature—were less than fully welcome in universities, whose members still thought of universities as communities of scholars. Van Wyck Brooks was never permanently attached to a university; nor was Edmund Wilson. Today one is hard pressed to think of an important literary critic who works outside the university. (On the other hand, one is hard pressed to think of an important literary critic.) Yet the university may not be a much better place for criticism than it is for the novel. In a university setting a critic may lose sight of what literature is supposed to be about—itself nowadays a great intramural literary-critical question—and confuse what is most teachable in literature with what is most important. Having critics resident in universities has also legitimized criticism itself as a scholarly function, which has had the effect of vastly increasing the glut of trashy criticism that is part of the current scene: hopeless journals such as *Diacritics* and *Wisconsin Fiction Studies* and useless series of books such as the Twayne series on contemporary authors and the University of Southern Illinois's Cross Current series. But these, as everyone in the racket knows, aren't actually to be read; they are only part of the apparatus of university publication which makes promotion possible.

One of the results of legitimizing criticism in the university has been to professionalize it. Much literary criticism today is written for colleagues, not for people interested in books. But then whole books are no longer written for people who are interested in books. There is, for example, much current debate in literary theory about the way people read texts and about the meaning of language, much demonstration of techniques for proving that reality doesn't exist. It is all very ingenious, this work of structuralists, semiologists, Foucaultists; it is also all very boring. Yet it dominates the current literary-critical scene in a way it could never do if literary criticism were not so securely centered in the university, where people seem to have endless time for such nonsense and where to oppose it—as such critics as Gerald

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Graff and Frederick Crews have done—is to condemn oneself to spending a good part of one's days rushing about screaming, "The world is round! The world is round!"

The larger point is that the usurpation of contemporary literature by the university continues to grow, so that today it sometimes seems as if there are two literary cultures: academic literary culture and non-academic literary culture. To be sure, there is some crossover. Saul Bellow teaches literature at the University of Chicago, and yet he does not seem a university writer. Thomas Pynchon, so far as anyone knows, does not teach in a university, and yet it is difficult to imagine many people outside universities reading his novels. Many writers seem to drop in on universities from time to time, spending a quarter or an academic year teaching. Some are happy to have the work, some curse the society that will not reward them sufficiently to allow them to work at their writing without interrruption.

With its creative-writing courses (sometimes entire "programs"), its conferences and symposia on literary subjects, its poetry readings, the university might appear to be, from the outside at least, a true termite mound of literary activity. From the inside, though, it tends to look rather different. Take, for example, poetry readings. Sometimes it seems that the skies must be dark with poets aloft, flying to their various campus readings, so many have been the poetry readings on American campuses. I myself was not long ago at a university in Ohio, a small liberal-arts school, where conversation revealed that an almost endless chain of poets had read there: Ignatow, Levertov, Wakoski, et al. Do many people show up for these poetry readings? I asked. Usually eight or ten kids, I was told, or as many students as the teacher of the modern poetry course could roust out.

One poet who apparently draws unfailingly large crowds at universities is the feminist Adrienne Rich. I have never seen Miss Rich in performance. Doubtless hers is a fine enough show. Yet it does say something about the present state of literature that the only poet who can consistently draw large crowds at a university is a thoroughly politicized one. Universities have political agendas; they seem to want to do what they construe to be the right thing by all groups within the university community. Thus universities are quick—or at least they were quick, when the money was at hand—to set up black studies programs, women's studies programs, you name it. Because universities are disposed to this general view, literature under their auspices has come to look a little like the Democratic Party under George McGovern.

Years before the intervention of contemporary writing in the university—or has it been the other way round: the intervention of the university in contemporary writing?—nothing was conceded to a writer because she was a woman or he was a Jew or she was a black or he was a homosexual. There was something called the Republic of Letters, and this republic took no census. It included only people who were serious about writing. There was also a fairly simple division of writers, or at any rate only one division that mattered: good writers and bad. How different this is from today, when a great writer like Willa Cather is excluded from the academic canon of American literature for having written stories and novels with insufficiently feminist views. The problem, clearly, is that what is judged the best in literature by the university is not always what people who passionately care about literature know to be the best. If what the university judges to be the best in writing—based on the books used in classrooms or the research done on particular authors—were indeed the best, then Virginia Woolf would be a greater writer than Tolstoy, which, as Virginia Woolf herself would have told you, is scarcely so.

No one knows how many writers work in universities and how many work outside them. There are, along with those writers permanently attached to universities, writers who have never been connected with universities: William Styron, John Updike, and Norman Mailer, to name three novelists.

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Among writers in the baggy category known as non-fiction, Tom Wolfe, Edward Hoagland, and Gay Talese have steered clear of the university. The novelist Robert Stone and the critic Susan Sontag seem to duck in and out. Joan Didion is not a university writer, though she seems to fill her purse fairly regularly by writing screenplays. These are writers of established reputation. Well below them is a group of writers, literary gypsies as I think of them, who swing about the country, arranging a few months or weeks at one or another of the writers colonies (Yaddo, McDowell, Breadloaf in the summer), teaching a stint where they can find it, doing a writing "workshop" one week, waiting for a check for a book review the next, living pretty much from hand to mouth. Sometimes impressive in what they have sacrificed for their writing, sometimes comically fraudulent in their pretensions, they are the Coxey's Army of contemporary American literature.

While the academic segment of literary culture has become more specialized, more professionalized, more sepulchred within university walls, the non-academic segment has become more public, more gaudy, more vulgar—and in a big way. Judging by media time and space, there appears to be a nearly endless if altogether superficial interest in the lives of writers, novelists chief among them. Writers in this connection have come to seem an arm of the entertainment industry. The financial details of Saul Bellow's difficult divorce were treated in the press as national news. Gore Vidal and Truman Capote are by now established television personalities. Norman Mailer is permanently hot copy, which his actions do nothing to discourage; indeed, he seems to live his life in order to be framed in newsmagazine prose. Everywhere writers are dropped onto talk-show couches, where they are questioned about their private lives. Those who tend to stay away from such Venus's-flytraps of gossip, Philip Roth for instance, make up for this by revealing more than one wishes to know about them in their own fiction. And on the subject of gossip, why should I, who never met him, know that a dignified man such as the late John Cheever seems to have had a serious drinking problem? The reason is that John Cheever somehow felt he owed it to Dick Cavett to tell him so. We have among us today so many would-be Boswells, and no Dr. Johnsons whatsoever.

Neither inside nor outside the university has contemporary literature been able to produce a towering literary figure. A figure of the kind I have in mind is usually not strictly an artist, but also a man of letters. Voltaire was such a figure for the French Enlightenment. Dr. Johnson, holding entirely different views, fulfilled a similar function for his age in England. In the nineteenth century in Russia the key literary figure was Vassarion Gregorievich Belinsky (1811-1848), a critic who expressed the passion of his age—expressed it and embodied it. Of Belinsky, Isaiah Berlin has written:

> For him the man and the artist and the citizen are one; and whether you write a novel, or a poem, or a work of history or philosophy, or an article in a newspaper, or compose a symphony or picture, you are, or should be, expressing the whole of your nature . . . and you are responsible as a man for what you do as an artist.

It is not clear whether America has ever had such a figure, though some might argue that Emerson came close in the middle nineteenth century, others that H.L. Mencken, roughly between World War I and the beginning of the Depression, achieved something like this literary authority. I suppose that there are those who might put forth Edmund Wilson for this special assignment, though I think that his rather commonplace political views disqualify him (and Wilson was a very political character). Be that as it may, there is no one even remotely in contention for the role today. And that there isn't speaks to the thinness of current literary culture.

In its intellectual life, ours has been preponderantly a political age. By age I mean roughly the past twenty-five years or so; by political age I do not mean to imply that no

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interesting literary work has been done in that time, only that the chief issues, questions, and preoccupations have been political, not literary. Communism, the Cold War, the Third World, the kind of society America is or ought to be, these are among the subjects that have used up so much of the intellectual oxygen of the past quarter-century. Nothing in literature has been able to hold a candle to them. Experimentalism in literature, a towering question to the modernist writers, towers no longer; it is of interest only to its few practitioners and to those few academics caught up in the notion that there has to be a perpetual literary avant-garde, the equivalent in literature of Trotsky's permanent revolution. Well, there will always be a literary avant-garde, as there will always be an England, but our avant-garde—producing concrete poetry, novels that come in boxes, books that can be shuffled like cards—is quite beside the point, not to say boring well past tedium.

Although I have never heard anyone speak of it, one of the reigning questions about the literature of our day is why so few American literary masterpieces have been produced in the past quarter-century. Cyril Connolly once said that "the true function of a writer is to produce a masterpiece and no other task is of any consequence." I myself do not quite believe that, though I do wonder why contemporary American writing has produced so few books that seem indispensable. There is no point in stopping to name particular works here, but I suspect the titles in contention for the status of literary masterpiece can be counted up without the need for removing both hands from one's pockets. During this period much graceful poetry has been produced, some extraordinary novels, and a number of interesting autobiographies, but few works about which one can confidently say, "If this had not been written, life would seem less rich," which is one definition of a masterpiece.

If it seems too hard on literature to ask it to produce masterpieces at regular intervals, consider yet another point: that ours has also been an age without great literary magazines. Sadly, no large-circulation magazine can today sustain itself by publishing chiefly literary fare. Indeed, it doesn't seem to have been possible for the past half century or so. But *The Atlantic Monthly* under Edward Weeks was noted for its sympathy for fiction. Even the old, square *Saturday Evening Post* was fiction-minded, publishing, along with many sappy stories, works by William Faulkner and John O'Hara. When *Life* obtained the rights to Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea,* it advertised it as a great coup. One used to think of *The New Yorker* as a great magazine for short stories, the home of Cheever and Salinger and Updike and (later) I.B. Singer and Ann Beattie. Indeed, it remains hospitable to good fiction; but can anyone doubt that the heart of the magazine has changed from the literary to the political? Not only is this true of its Talk of the Town section but easily the most discussed pieces to run in *The New Yorker* in our day have been pieces of political consequence: Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring,* Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem,* James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time,* Charles Reich's *The Greening of America,* Jonathan Schell's *The Fate of the Earth.*

In intellectual journalism surely the two most interesting American magazines of the past few decades have been *The New York Review of Books* and *Commentary.* Each, it needs to be emphasized, has derived its energy and élan from politics, although *The New York Review* has lost some of its luster since the Vietnam War. *Partisan Review,* the premier intellectual American magazine of the Forties and the better part of the Fifties, grew spavined trying to keep up with cultural trends in the 1960s: it ran essays on the Beatles, pornography, and other subjects unworthy of a magazine that had once published George Orwell, Albert Camus, Ignazio Silone, and André Malraux.

Mention of these four names—Orwell, Camus, Silone, and Malraux—is a sad reminder of two further changes in literary culture in our day. First, there are few figures in Europe today to compare with these men;

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with the possible exception of Günter Grass, I can think of none. Consequently, there no longer seems much reason to look to Europe for any sort of cultural guidance or literary example. Second, each of these men functioned, for the better part of his career, as an independent literary intellectual: in the United States today the independent literary intellectual, never a flourishing breed to begin with, is all but extinct.

Orwell, Camus, Silone, Malraux, each of them lived in a time of great political passion, each was himself political in the most serious way. But as literary intellectuals they wrote on political subjects with the authority of literature behind them. In the United States today things tend to run the other way round. Such novelists as Robert Coover, E.L. Doctorow, and Robert Stone create literature with the authority of politics behind them; for them the novel is politics by other means. Great writers have always had their politics. Think of Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy. Or think of Joseph Conrad. Conrad obviously detested the revolutionary personality; and yet one doesn't have to agree with Conrad's political views in order to recognize that there is more at stake in, say, *The Secret Agent* than politics alone. Reading E.L. Doctorow, on the other hand, is a different experience entirely: if one disagrees with Doctorow's politics, the pleasure is drained from his novels; if, in other words, you do not believe that the Rosenbergs were innocent or that Henry Ford was ridiculous, you are excluded.

Traditionally, it has been the job of the literary intellectual to blow the whistle when politics infringed upon literature or popular culture. Orwell is the example of the modern literary intellectual par excellence; like a finely tuned Geiger counter, he could tick off unfailingly the political content in works of high and low culture. He spoke for things above politics. One of the deplorable features of the current scene is that, just as the literary intellectual is disappearing, political purposes are increasingly infiltrating literature. Not that they haven't done so fairly steadily since at least the 1930s. Nearly every one of the printed literary opinions of Malcolm Cowley and Dwight Macdonald, to cite two examples, needs to be fumigated for possible political motive. But so thoroughly politicized has contemporary literary life become that most people assume that it is the literary man's duty to be on the side of revolution, to find the United States racist and the members of the middle class either desperate dogs or insensate swine. Whether such notions are by now more literarily uninteresting than untrue or more untrue than literarily uninteresting is difficult to say.

What isn't difficult to say is that political argument has badly torn up what was left of New York literary life. So many people who otherwise have so much in common no longer speak to one another because of political differences. Not to live in New York, to put a bit of distance between oneself and such a scene, in these circumstances seems sensible. "As you grow older as a writer," Saul Bellow recently told an interviewer in *Esquire,* "you become more and more accustomed to talking to yourself. In what the punks like to call the literary milieu you'd think you'd find some *milieudniks* to talk to. You'd think there were heaps of people to attach yourself to. But you have to pick yourself through heaps of *no goodniks,* casts of thousands in the literary world who don't know what the hell I'm talking about."

Writers have always grumbled, of course. Some of the chapter titles from Isaac D'Israeli's early nineteenth-century book *Calamities of Authors* name conditions that have not greatly changed in our own time: "The Sufferings of Authors," "The Pains of Fastidious Egotism," "The Despair of Young Poets," "Literary Hatred," and "Miseries of Successful Authors." When writers complain about their work—when I complain about my own—it is useful to recall Mencken's scoffing retort to authorly moaning: "If authors could work in large well-ventilated factories, like cigarmakers or garment workers, with plenty of their mates about and a flow of lively professional gossip to entertain them, their labor would be enormously lighter."

And yet, normal grumbling aside, that there is so little in the way of solid literary culture

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in the United States at the present time has serious consequences. When literary culture, like culture generally, becomes too attenuated, something snaps, rituals lose their significance, traditions wear away, life changes—and not necessarily for the better. To mention but a single ritual, consider the bestowal of literary prizes in America. Pulitzers, Guggenheims, American Academy of Arts & Letters awards—every publisher's or critics' prize has been drained of its importance; any value it might have had has been dribbled away by its having been given too many times to second- and third-rate writers. To win certain literary prizes is nearly enough to encourage self-doubt. In a world of less than perfect justice rewards have often gone to the richly undeserving. Yet the fact is that twenty years ago if a novel won a National Book Award there was a good chance that it was a fairly impressive piece of literary work. One can't, I think, say the same today; so dwindled in significance have such literary prizes become that scarcely anyone can remember who, over the past five years, has won them.

The only prize serious writers can now unequivocally esteem is good readers. Good readers are the unknown variable, the great mystery, in current American literary culture. Good readers are those readers who read not only intelligently—with mental acuity, an ardor for language, a sense of humor—but also in the hope of having their souls stirred by literature. How many such readers are there in the United States? Impossible to know, though it seems fairly safe to guess that their numbers are not legion. Apart from poets and people who aspire to write poetry, how many people read contemporary poetry? Again, impossible to know. Serious fiction sometimes sells in great numbers, but what do these numbers mean? Saul Bellow, some years ago, remarked that he thought himself a fortunate writer: "When I publish a novel," he said, "roughly fifty thousand people buy it in its cloth edition, five thousand or so actually read it through—and five hundred care." Those numbers sound fairly accurate to me. What's more, having five hundred readers who really care sounds very impressive.

This is, I believe, the place to insert the standard paragraph on the baleful effects of television. The reason people aren't reading good books, this paragraph usually runs, is that, slack-jawed, they are sitting in front of their television sets. Worse: their children sit there even longer, even slacker-jawed. No one reads anymore. Ours is becoming a visual culture . . . and so forth. The standard paragraph on the baleful effects of television tends to overlook the fact that before there was television there was bridge and bowling and the corner saloon—one's taste in these matters depending on one's social class. There was never a shortage of excuses for not spending time with books. Today, though, in the era of the crushing best-seller and what sometimes seems like nearly universal higher education, writers feel all too often that readers disappoint them. Even so, much as one wishes it were otherwise and no matter how many BAs, MAs, and PhDs roam the range, reading serious books has always been and will probably remain a minority taste. That serious books do break through from time to time—Santayana's *The Last Puritan,* I always remind myself when sending a manuscript off to a publisher, was a Book of the Month Club Main Selection—is nice but never to be expected.

What is not nice but now usually to be expected is that a book, the result usually of years of effort, will appear in bookstores for two or three months and then disappear without trace. Under current publishing arrangements, this happens fairly regularly, and to good books quite as frequently as to bad. In a strong literary culture if a book fails with the public a writer can at least hope for the appreciation of his literary peers. But now, unfortunately, it is not always there. Too often good books are stupidly read by their reviewers, half-heartedly supported by their publishers, ignored by the public, and too soon meet their pulper. When real talent goes unappreciated it is yet another sign of a weakened literary culture—and we live today in a greatly weakened literary culture, in which foolish books are frequently praised and subtle books are frequently dumped.

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Over a local FM station not long ago I heard a jazz musician describe his musical education. "I don't know, man," he said, "I copied from cats like Charlie Parker, Ben Webster, Art Tatum. I guess they copied from cats like Louis Armstrong, Fats Waller, Earl Hines. I don't know who those cats copied from, but I'm sure it was somebody." Although he never mentioned the word, this particular cat was explaining the way tradition works in the arts—one generation borrowing from the one preceding it, each artist adding his own special touches, point of view, and vision to what has gone before. In literature, it is beginning to feel as if the tradition is breaking down. It could be that literary culture is merely going through a bad patch. But it feels as if more than a bad patch is involved: it feels as if circumstances are conspiring to make literature seem a second-rate activity.

Still, although a rich literary culture is a true boon to a writer, its absence can't kill off serious writing altogether. If evidence for this is wanted, the dissident Russian writers of our day, who have worked in circumstances in which everything possible has been done to demolish literary culture, provide it in excelsis. It is difficult to say just how many of our potential writers will decide, for want of reinforcement in literary culture, that the writing life is not for them. Certainly more than a few. Others will persist, largely for the reasons that Edward Gibbon gave for his own literary persistence: "some fame, some profit, and the assurance of daily amusement." Nevertheless, that something fundamental in the nature of the literary life has been altered, this cannot be doubted.

Imagine, in this connection, F. Scott Fitzgerald as a very young man today. Assume—what is today unlikely, since he was not a very good prep-school student—that he attends Princeton, and there takes creative-writing courses from such teachers on the staff as Joyce Carol Oates and Geoffrey Wolff. His teachers encourage the young Scott Fitzgerald, and so, before graduation, he applies to and is accepted by the University of Iowa Program in Creative Writing. At Iowa he is considered among the most promising of students, though during his first year there his teachers talk him out of writing a rather shapeless novel he plans to call *This Side of Paradise.* Concentrate, they tell him, on the short stories, for he shall need a full book of them to qualify for his doctorate in creative writing. (Around this time he meets and falls madly in love with a student in the English department, a southern girl named Zelda Sayre, but when her fellowship is not renewed she is forced to leave Iowa City, and eventually they fall out of touch.) Scott's stories, meanwhile, are meeting with some success: one is published in *Salmagundi,* one in *The Virginia Quarterly Review,* and two are accepted by *TriQuarterly.* He is on his way, or so it seems. He is offered a job at the University of Michigan, teaching freshman composition and two courses in creative writing. It is a tenure-track job. At Michigan, between classes and grading papers and academic committee meetings, he begins a story about a young man who, through illicit means, has made a great deal of money, with which he sets out to recapture the past, chiefly symbolized by a beautiful woman, a lost love who has since married. The story works out wonderfully, splendid beyond his own expectations. But it is rather too long for a short story and too brief for a novel, or so a number of editors say. If he will agree to cut the story radically, one magazine editor tells him, he, the editor, will be glad to look at it again. A publisher's editor has ideas for expanding the book: flesh out the character Wolfsheim a bit, give Daisy two daughters, etc. He tries cutting, he tries expanding, but either way it is no go. The story seems just right to him as it is. He decides to put it away for now. It is around this time that he begins to drink. At age forty-four, exactly ten years after he has been awarded tenure at the University of Michigan, his heart, weakened by a steady consumption of alcohol, gives out. But then, who ever said that the literary life was easy?

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Berlin 1928
by Elias Canetti

Editor's note: Elias Canetti was twenty-three years old when he came to Berlin to spend the summer of 1928. In Vienna, where he was studying chemistry and writing poetry, he had fallen under the spell of Karl Kraus. This formidable moralist was a radical pacifist whose fiercely irreverent journal, Die Fackel *(The Torch), written entirely by himself, was then at the zenith of its influence on young and rebellious spirits. In Vienna, the young Canetti had also formed a close attachment to two young women—identified here as Veza and Ibby—whom he admired for their personal independence as well as their advanced literary interests. It was at the urging of the latter—a Hungarian poet whose work Canetti had helped to translate into German—that he decided to spend his summer holiday in Berlin, where she had gone to live.*

"My curiosity grew with each of her letters," Canetti has written of this episode. "She never mentioned anyone who wasn't famous for something. I had read little by the writers she named, but, like everyone else, I knew who they were. However, the man who meant more to me than any writer was George Grosz. The thought of seeing him made up my mind.

"On July 15, 1928, right at the end of the semester, I went to Berlin for the summer."

Wieland Hertzfelde had a garret apartment at 76 Kurfürstendamm. The building stood right in the middle of the hubbub, but things seemed quiet way up there; you scarcely thought about the noise. During the summer he lived with his family by Nikolassee. Renting out part of his city garret, he left the other part for me to work in. I had a small bedroom and, right next to it, a study with a lovely round table. Here, everything I needed for work was piled up. I was thus left undisturbed, which greatly pleased me. I did not have to go to the publishing house, which was cramped and noisy. Herzfelde would come up to the garret for a few hours to discuss the project. He was planning a biography of Upton Sinclair, who was celebrating his fiftieth birthday.

The Malik house was well know for publishing the drawings of George Grosz. But it was also interested in new Russian writers—and not just the new ones. Along with a complete edition of Gorky, Malik had brought out one of Tolstoy; Malik also focused on authors who had become known since the Revolution. For me, the most important of these authors was Isaac Babel, whom I admired no less than I did George Grosz.

Now the Malik publishing house not only had a good name, it was also lucky enough to be commercially successful, something it owed to its star author, Upton Sinclair. Since his exposé of the Chicago stockyards, he had become one of the most widely read American authors. He was a prolific writer, always striving to find new abuses to pillory. There was no lack of them. He was hardworking and courageous: he brought out a new book each year. His books grew thicker and thicker. Sinclair was greatly respected, par-

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ticularly in Europe. By now, around his fiftieth birthday, he had written enough books to fill someone else's life's work in addition to his own. It has also been proved that his Chicago book led to abolishing certain abuses in the stockyards. No less important for his reputation was the fact that modern American literature, which was to conquer the world, was only just emerging. Upton Sinclair's fame was a "material" fame, bound to America as its material. And, not insignificantly, Sinclair, who, as America's true muckraker, attacked pretty much everything, aroused the widest interest in his country and even contributed most to the "America" fad, which was rampant in Berlin and to which Bertolt Brecht, George Grosz, and others had succumbed. Dos Passos, Hemingway, Faulkner, writers of an incomparably higher rank, did not have their impact until later.

Back then, in the summer of 1928, Wieland Herzfelde could not be blamed for taking Upton Sinclair seriously and even wanting to write his biography. Kept busy by his publishing house, Herzfelde needed help for his project and had invited me, at Ibby's recommendation, to spend the summer months in Berlin.

So here I was in Berlin, never taking more than ten steps without running into a celebrity. Wieland knew everyone and introduced me to everyone right away. I was a nobody here and quite aware of this; I had done nothing. At twenty-three, I was nothing more than hopeful. Yet it was astonishing how people treated me: not with scorn, but with curiosity, and, above all, never with condemnation. I myself, after four years under Karl Kraus's influence, was filled with all his contempt and condemnation and acknowledged nothing that was determined by greed, selfishness, or frivolity. Objects to be condemned were all prescribed by Kraus. You were not even allowed to look at them; he had already taken care of that for you and made the decision. It was a *sterilized* intellectual life that we led in Vienna, a special kind of hygiene prohibiting any intermingling whatsoever. No sooner was something universal, no sooner had it gotten into the newspapers, than it was taboo and untouchable.

And suddenly, the very opposite occurred in Berlin, where contacts of any sort, incessant, were part of the very substance of living. This brand of curiosity must have agreed with me, though I did not realize it. I yielded naïvely and innocently, and, just as I had strolled into the maws of tyranny right after my arrival in Vienna, where I had been kept nicely aloof from all temptations, so too, in Berlin, I was at the mercy of the hotbed of vice for several weeks. Nevertheless, I was not alone. I had two guides, and they were so different from each other that they helped me doubly: Ibby and Wieland.

Wieland knew everyone, because he had been here for such a long time. He had arrived in Berlin before the war, at the age of seventeen, and had become friends with Else Lasker-Schüler. Through her, he had met most of the writers and painters, especially the *Sturm* people. Wieland owed her even more: the name of his publishing house, which he had founded at the age of twenty-one with his brother and Grosz. And it is not just my opinion that the exotic name Malik helped to make the house known.

To everyone's amazement, Wieland turned out to be a good businessman. His ability contrasted so sharply with his boyish freshness that it seemed almost incredible. He was not really an adventurer, but he won over a good many people with the adventurous quality that they ascribed to him. He got close to people quickly, like a child, but never became overattached, and he detached himself easily. You never had the feeling that he fully belonged to anyone. It was as if he could get up and leave at any time. He was considered footloose, and people wondered where he got his energy from. For he was always on the go, agile and active, never burdened by superfluous knowledge; averse to traditional education, he informed himself by "snooping," not by zealous abstract reading. However, when he had to produce something he was amazingly precise, suddenly as obstinate as an old man. Both attitudes, the boyish one and the old, experienced one, existed simul-

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taneously, coming into play alternately whenever he found either attitude suitable.

There was one person who was more than near and dear to him. They were bound by an umbilical cord, which may not have been so secret, but which you did not notice for a long time because the two men were as different as if they had come from separate planets: John Heartfield, his brother, who was five years older than he. Wieland was soft and easily moved. You might have regarded him as sentimental, but he was sentimental only intermittently. He had various tempi at his disposal, all of them natural to him; and only one tempo, the emotional one, was gradual. Heartfield was always swift. His reactions were so spontaneous that they got the better of him. He was skinny and very short, and if an idea struck him he would leap into the air. He uttered his sentences vehemently, as if attacking you with his leap. He would angrily hum around you like a wasp.

I first experienced this on Kurfürstendamm. Walking along unsuspectingly between John and Wieland, I was asked about termites by the latter and I tried to explain: "They're completely blind and they move only in underground corridors." John leaped up at my side and hissed at me, as though I were responsible for the blindness of termites, perhaps also as though I were putting them down for their blindness: "You termite you! You're a termite yourself!" And from then on he never called me anything but "termite." At the time, I was frightened: I thought I had insulted him, I did not know how. After all, I had not called him a termite. It took me a while to realize that this was how he reacted to everything that was new to him. It was his way of learning: he could only learn aggressively. And I believe one could show that this is the secret of his montages. He brought things together, he confronted things after first leaping up at them, and the tension of these leaps is preserved in his montages.

John, I feel, was the most thoughtless of men. He consisted of spontaneous and vehement moments. He thought only when he was busy doing a montage. Since he was not always calculating away at something like other people, he remained fresh and choleric. His reaction was a kind of anger, but it was no selfish anger. He learned only from things that he regarded as attacks; and in order to experience something new he had to see it as an attack. Other people let new things glide off them or swallowed them like syrup. John had to shake new things furiously in order to hold them without enfeebling them.

Only gradually did it dawn on me how indispensable these two brothers were to one another. Wieland never criticized John for anything. He did not excuse his brother's unusual behavior, nor did he seek to explain it. He took it for granted; and it was only when he spoke of his childhood that I understood the bond between them. They were four orphans—two brothers and two sisters—and had been taken in by foster parents in Aigen, near Salzburg. Wieland was lucky with his foster parents. The elder brother, Helmut (this was John's name before he changed it to his English name), had a harder time. The two brothers were always aware that they did not have their real parents, and they became very close. Wieland's true strength was his bond with John. Together, they gained a foothold in Berlin. Helmut officially changed his name to John Heartfield in protest against the war. This took courage, since he did so before the war ended.

George Grosz, whom they met during that period, became equally good friends with both of them. When the Malik publishing house was started, John quite naturally designed the dust jackets. Each brother had his own family, his own home. They never pressed or pestered one another; but they were there at the same time; they were together in the turbulent and incredibly active life of Berlin.

Brecht

The first thing that struck me about Brecht was his disguise. I was taken to lunch at

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Schlichter's, the restaurant in which the intellectual Berlin hung out. In particular, many actors came there. They were pointed out; you recognized them on the spot: the illustrated magazines made them part of your image of public things. However, one must admit that there was not very much theater in their outer appearance, in their greetings and order, in the way they bolted down their food, swallowed, paid. It was a colorful picture, but without the colorfulness of the stage. The only one I noticed among them all —and because of his proletarian disguise— was Brecht. He was very emaciated. He had a hungry face, which looked askew because of his cap. His words came out wooden and choppy. When he gazed at you, you felt like an object of value that he, the pawnbroker, with his piercing black eyes, was appraising as something that had no value. He was a man of few words; you learned nothing about the results of his appraisal. It seemed incredible that he was only thirty. He did not look as if he had aged prematurely, but as if he had always been old.

The notion of an old pawnbroker haunted me during those weeks. I could not shake it off, if only because it seemed so absurd. It was nourished by the fact that Brecht prized nothing so much as usefulness, and he let on, in every way he could, how greatly he despised "lofty" convictions. What he meant was a practical, a solid usefulness, and in this respect there was something Anglo-Saxon about him, in its American variety.

The cult of America had already taken root in Berlin, especially among left-wing artists. Berlin emulated New York with neon lights and cars. There was nothing Brecht felt so tender about as his car. Upton Sinclair's books, those exposés of abuses, had a two-edged effect. People shared his attitude about scourging these abuses; but at the same time they absorbed the American substratum from which those abuses had sprung; they assimilated it like food and pinned their hopes on its expansion and extension. Chaplin happened to be in Hollywood, and, even in this atmosphere, one could applaud his success with a clear conscience.

One of the contradictions about Brecht was that his outer appearance had something ascetic to it. Hunger could also seem like fasting, as though he were deliberately forgoing the object of his greed. He was no pleasure-seeker: he did not find satisfaction in the moment and did not spread out in the moment. Anything he took (and he took anything that might be useful to him from right and left, from behind him and before him) had to be utilized instantly: it was his raw material, and he produced things with it incessantly. Thus, he was a man who manufactured something all the time, and that was his true goal.

The words I annoyed Brecht with, especially the demand that one could write only out of conviction and never for money, must have sounded downright laughable in the Berlin emulated New York with neon lights and cars. There was nothing Brecht felt so tender about as his car. Upton Sinclair's books, those exposés of abuses, had a two-edged effect. People shared his attitude about sign of success if he did receive money. He had great respect for money; the only important thing was *who* received it and not where it came from. He was certain that nothing could make him swerve from his path. Anyone who helped him was on his side (or else cutting into his own flesh). Berlin was teeming with patrons: they were part of the scenery. He used them without falling prey to them.

The things that I said to him, and that annoyed him, weighed less than a thread against all that. I rarely saw him alone. Ibby was always present; typically, he regarded her wit as cynicism. He noticed that she treated me respectfully; she never took sides with him. He loved terrifying me or showering me with scorn when she asked me for information in his presence. Sometimes he made a mistake in some trivial matter; she would not be put off. She accepted my information, included it definitively in the conversation without batting an eyelash, but also without mocking Brecht. The fact that she did not make fun of him to his face should have indicated that she was not indifferent to

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being with him. In her own way, she had surrendered to the pervasive avant-garde atmosphere around him.

He did not care much for people, but he put up with them. He respected those who were persistently useful to him; he noticed others only to the extent that they corroborated his somewhat monotonous view of the world. It was this view that increasingly determined the character of his plays, while, in his poems, he started out far more vividly than anyone else in his day. Later on, with the help of the Chinese (but this does not belong here), he found his way to something like wisdom.

It must sound surprising when I say how much I owe him, despite all my hostility toward him. During the period of our (almost daily) brief collisions, I was reading his *Manual of Piety.* I was enchanted by these poems. I took them up in one swoop without thinking of him. There were some that cut me to the quick; for instance, "The Legend of the Dead Soldier," "Against Seduction," "Memory of Marie A.," "Poor B.B." Many things, most of the volume, struck me deeply. My own writings crumbled into dust. It would be too much to say that I was ashamed of them; they simply no longer existed; nothing was left of them, not even shame.

For three years, my ego had been feeding on the poems I wrote. I had shown them to no one outside of Veza, but I showed her almost everything. I had taken her encouragement seriously, trusted her opinion. Some of my poems had filled me so intensely that I felt as vast as the universe. I had written all sorts of other things, not just poems; but the poems were what counted for me—along with the plan to write a book on crowds. This was still a plan, however; it could take years. And for the moment, at least, almost nothing existed of it: a few notes and preliminary jottings, things I had learned for the book. For the time being, however, the things I learned were not yet my own; this was still to come. My own things, I had thought, were the many completed pieces, short and long poems. And now everything had been shattered at one blow. I had no pity for all my stuff. I swept it away with no regret: garbage and rubbish. Nor did I praise the man who had written the real poems; everything about him repelled me, from his compulsive disguise to his wooden speech. But I admired, I loved, his poems.

I was so repulsed by him personally that I said nothing about the poems when I saw him. Every time I saw him, and especially every time I heard him speak, I felt furious. I did not let on about my fury any more than about my enthusiasm for the *Manual of Piety.* No sooner had he uttered a cynical sentence than I replied with a severe and highly moral sentence. Once—it must have sounded funny in Berlin—I said that a true writer has to *isolate* himself in order to accomplish anything. I said he needed periods in the world and periods *outside* the world, contrasting strongly with one another. Brecht said his telephone was always on his desk, and he could write only if it rang often. A huge map of the world hung in front of him on the wall, he said, and he looked at the map so as never to be outside the world. I would not give in and, shattered as I was by realizing the futile wretchedness of my verse, I insisted on my advice, facing the man who wrote the best poems. Morality was one thing and matter was another, and when I dealt with this man, who cared only about matter, then nothing but morality counted for me. I railed against the advertisements contaminating Berlin. They did not bother him. On the contrary, he said, advertisements had their good points: he had written a poem about Steyr Automobiles and been given a car for it. For me, these were words from the devil's own mouth. His boastful confession floored me. I was dumbstruck. No sooner had we left him than Ibby said: "He likes riding in his car," as though it were nothing. But I—crazy as I was—saw him as a murderer. I had "The Legend of the Dead Soldier" on my mind, and he had entered a contest for Steyr Automobiles! "He flatters his car even now," said Ibby. "He talks about it as if it were his girlfriend. Why shouldn't he flatter it *beforehand* in order to get it?"

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Brecht liked Ibby. He put up with her witty, unsentimental ways, which contrasted so greatly with her radiant country looks. Nor did she disturb him with any demands. She never competed with anyone. She had surfaced in Berlin like Pomona and could vanish any moment. But it was different with me: I came from Vienna with lofty tones, devoted to the purity and rigor of Karl Kraus, more in thrall to him than ever before because of his Fifteenth of July poster. Nor did I keep his fortifying pomp to myself: I *had* to blurt it out. It was only two or three years since I had escaped the domestic money talk; it still had an effect on me: I never once saw Brecht without expressing my disdain for money. I *had* to hoist my flag and reveal my colors: one did not write for newspapers, one did not write for money; one was committed heart and soul to every word one wrote.

This irritated Brecht for more than one reason: I had published nothing; he had never heard of me; my words had no substance for this man, who so greatly valued concrete realities. Since no one had offered me anything, I had refused nothing. No newspaper had asked me to write for it, so I had not resisted any newspaper. "I write only for money," he said drily and hatefully. "I wrote a poem about Steyr Automobiles and I got a car for it." There it was again; it popped up frequently. He was proud of this Steyr car, which he drove into the ground. After an accident, he managed to wangle a new one by means of an advertising trick.

My situation, however, was a lot more complicated than one might assume from what has been said so far. For the man who was faith and conviction for me, whom I venerated more than anyone else in the world, without whose wrath and zeal I wouldn't have cared to live, whom I had never dared to approach (only one single time: after July 15 I had addressed a prayer to him, not a plea, a prayer of gratitude, and I did not even assume that he paid it any heed) —Karl Kraus—was in Berlin at this time and friendly with Brecht. He saw Brecht frequently, and it was through Brecht that I saw him several weeks before the premiere of *The Threepenny Opera.*

I did not see Kraus alone, only together with Brecht and other people who were interested in this production. I did not say a word to Kraus. I was afraid to show him how much he meant to me. I had attended every one of his readings since spring 1924, when I arrived in Vienna. But he didn't know this. And even if Brecht (who certainly guessed my state of mind) had made some joking remark about it to him (which wasn't very likely), Kraus let nothing on. He had ignored my exuberant letter of thanks for his poster after July 15; my name meant nothing to him: he must have received countless such letters and thrown them all away.

I much preferred his knowing nothing about me. I sat next to Ibby at the round table and kept quiet. I was oppressed by the thought of sitting at the table of a god. I felt unsure of myself, as though I had sneaked in. He was altogether different from the way I knew him at lectures. He hurled no lightning bolts, he damned no one. Of all the people sitting there—some ten or twelve—he was the most polite. He treated each person as if he or she were an unusual creature, and he sounded solicitous, as if assuring that person of his special protection. One felt that nobody escaped his notice; thus he lost nothing of the omniscience attributed to him. However, he deliberately stepped back behind the others, an equal among equals, peaceful, concerned with their sensitivities. His smile was so relaxed, I felt as if he were concealing himself. Given the countless parts I had heard him play, I knew how easily he could conceal himself. The role I saw him in now, however, was the one I would never have expected; and he carried it off: he remained the same for an hour or more. I expected something tremendous from him, and what came were cordialities. He treated everyone at the table with tenderness; however, he treated Brecht with love, as though Brecht were his son, the young genius—his *chosen* son.

The people at the table were talking about *The Threepenny Opera,* which did not have this

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title as yet; they were trying to hit on a name. Many suggestions were made. Brecht listened quietly, in no way as if it were his play. You could not tell that the ultimate decision was his. There were so many suggestions that I can no longer remember who said what. Karl Kraus had a suggestion, which he advocated without getting domineering; he tossed it into the debate, skeptically, as though doubting it. His suggestion was instantly superseded by another, a better one. I do not know from whom the title finally came. It was Brecht who presented it, but perhaps he had gotten it from someone not present and wanted to hear what these people thought about it. In his work he was astonishingly free with demarcations and property lines.

Ecce homo

"We're visiting Grosz," said Wieland. I did not quite believe that one could go there just like that. Wieland wanted to get something he needed for his publishing house, but he also wanted to impress me, for he had instantly noticed that there was *one* figure in Berlin whom I was dying to meet. Wieland enjoyed showing me everything that Berlin had to offer. He sort of liked my inexperience. It reminded him of his own when he had first come here. He was not domineering, like Brecht, who was always surrounded by acolytes. Brecht wanted people to think him hard-boiled, and he must have started at an early age. Be older than you are, just don't appear young. Innocence was despicable to him: he hated innocence, equating it with stupidity. He wanted to be nobody's fool; and long after there was nothing more to prove he flaunted his precocity, a schoolboy smoking his first cigar and gathering others whom he is trying to cheer-lead. Wieland, however, was in love with the innocence of his own childhood, seeing it as an idyll. He managed to hold his own in the cynicism of Berlin. By no means was he defenseless: he knew all the tricks of the trade, and he demonstrated his capabilities in the so-called struggle of life, which requires hardness, but above all indifference. He managed to hold his own, however, purely by sticking to the image of the innocent orphan boy that he had been. He could speak about it as if he still were that orphan boy. While working we sometimes got into these conversations; and, as hurried as life in Berlin may have been, when we sat at the round table in that room in his garret we often wandered away from Upton Sinclair, the object of our work, and turned to the younger Wieland. This present Wieland was no more than thirty-two, but it seemed like a huge leap to the Wieland of fifteen years earlier.

He showed me everything to be seen in Berlin, namely, the people, as though I were he himself, coming to Berlin for the first time. And he enjoyed my astonishment without observing it too carefully, for he was concerned less with me than with himself, as he had been at my age. It was good for me that he never put me down; he always introduced me as his "friend and colleague." Yet I had only known him for a few days, and I had not yet begun working.

Wieland did not ask me for any proof of my abilities; he did not want to read any of my writings. Perhaps it would have been a bother to read something of mine (it is amazing to think that he, the publisher whom I eventually knew best and most intimately, never, not even later, brought out any of my own writings). It was enough for him that we talked. He had heard some things from Ibby; I told him some things myself. Most important for him was that he could tell me, in *his* Berlin, about his innocent ways, his love for his youth, and that I listened. I thus gained his friendship by listening, and I cannot even say that this was cunning on my part. I enjoyed listening. I have always enjoyed listening when people speak about themselves. This seemingly quiet, passive tendency is so violent as to constitute my innermost concept of life. I will be dead when I no longer hear what a person is telling me about himself.

Why did I expect so much from Grosz? What did he mean to me? Ever since Frankfurt, when I had seen books of his displayed at the Bookstore for Young People—that is,

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for the past six years—I had been admiring these drawings and carrying them around in my head. Six young years are a long time. His drawings had struck me to the core at first sight. They expressed precisely what I felt after the things I saw around me during the inflation, after Herr Hungerbach's visit, after the deaf ears of my mother, who refused to notice anything happening around us. I liked the strength and recklessness you saw in these drawings, the ruthlessness and dreadfulness. Since they were extreme, I regarded them as Truth. A truth that mediated, that weakened, that explained, that excused was no Truth for me. I knew that Grosz's characters really existed. I had known it since my childhood in Manchester, when I had installed the ogre as my foe, which he then always remained for me. A short time after seeing Grosz's drawings, I heard Karl Kraus in Vienna, and the effect was the same. Except that, being a verbal person, I began to imitate Kraus. From him I could learn, above all, how to hear, but also, to a certain degree (and not without some reluctance), the rhetoric of accusal. I never imitated George Grosz: drawing has always been beyond me. I did seek and find his characters in real life, but the distance to a different medium always persisted. His talent was unattainable for me: he spoke in a different language, which I understood but which I would never be able to master for my own use. This meant that he never became a model for me—he was the object of my utmost admiration, but never a model.

The first time I entered Grosz's home, Wieland, as usual, introduced me as a "friend and colleague." The result was that I never felt *too* small. It did not cross my mind that Grosz was well acquainted with all of Wieland's friends and must have known that I was not one of them. Ibby was suddenly there; I had never been discussed. Ibby had announced that I would shortly be coming from Vienna, that was all.

I soon managed to get over such insecurities, however, for Grosz began to show Wieland his drawings; Wieland had published them and made them renowned. They had picked them out together, and Wieland had found titles for these drawings. Now too, titles were dropped, out of habit. Wieland loved spouting them quickly. There was no discussion of them. Grosz would accept Wieland's titles: they had brought him luck.

Grosz was dressed in tweed. He was strong and tan in contrast to Wieland, and he sucked at his pipe. He looked like a young skipper, and not an English one. He talked a great deal; he seemed more American. Since he was extremely open and cordial, I did not regard his costume as a disguise. I felt free with him and I let myself go. I was enthusiastic about everything he showed us. He was delighted by my enthusiasm, as if it were very important to him. He sometimes nodded at Wieland when I said something about a graphic. I sensed that I was on target; and while I couldn't open my mouth in front of Brecht without triggering his sarcasm, I aroused Grosz's interest and delight.

Grosz asked me whether I knew the *Ecce Homo* folder. I said no; the set had been banned by law. He went over to a chest, raised the lid, and removed a folder, which he then handed me as if it were nothing special. I thought he wanted me to have a look, and I opened it up. However, I was quickly enlightened: he said I could take it home, the folder was a present. "Not just anybody can get one," said Wieland, who knew how impulsive his friend was. But he did not need to say it. No act of magnanimity has ever eluded me, and I was overwhelmed by this one.

I put down the folder so as not to get into comical movements of happiness, and I had not quite finished thanking him when a visitor appeared: it was the last person I would have wished for or expected: Brecht. He came with all signs of respect, slightly bent. He was bringing a present for Grosz, a pencil, a completely ordinary pencil, which he placed on the drawing table, emphatically and significantly. Grosz accepted this modest homage and transformed it into something greater. He said: "This pencil was just what I needed. I can use it."

I felt intruded on by the visit, but I enjoyed

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seeing Brecht from a different side. This was how he acted when he wanted to show approval; the fact that it occurred in such a restrained and economical way made it all the more impressive. I wondered how Grosz felt about him, whether he liked him. Brecht did not stay long. When he had left, Grosz said to Wieland—casually, as though it were not meant for my ears: "He's got no time, the European stew." It did not sound hateful or hostile—perhaps skeptical, as though he had various opinions about Brecht, conflicting ones.

Wieland and I went our separate ways after leaving Grosz, Wieland to the publishing house, I to my round table in the garret, where the work on Upton Sinclair's documents was waiting for me. In contrast with the things he had exposed as a muckraker, Sinclair's own life seemed boring. This was due not to the *circumstances* of his life (which had been hard), but to his straight and narrow views. He was puritanical through and through. And even though I was just as puritanical and ought to have felt a kinship with him, even though I wholeheartedly approved of his attacks against terrible conditions, against humiliation and injustice, I felt that his assaults lacked satirical brilliance. Thus it was not surprising that I did not get right down to work that day. Instead, I opened the *Ecce Homo* folder: it contained everything that one missed in Upton Sinclair.

The folder had been banned as obscene. There is no denying that certain things in it could appear obscene. I took it all in with an odd mixture of horror and approval. These were dreadful creatures of Berlin's night life that you saw here, but they were here because they were viewed as dreadful. I regarded my disgust at them as the artist's disgust. I knew very little about all this; I had been in Berlin for only about a week. Grosz was one of the first people I visited. Ibby had introduced me to Brecht at Schlichter's; she regarded him, if only because he was a writer, as the most interesting thing that she could offer me in Berlin. We had gone to this restaurant every day. Brecht liked seeing Ibby, but she always dragged me along, and perhaps that was one reason why he made me the butt of his scorn. Wieland, however, was a generous man. Grosz was far more important to me than Brecht, and that was how it had come to this visit (I believe on the sixth day of my sojourn).

Now, however, I had brought home the *Ecce Homo* folder. It inserted itself between me and Berlin, and from then on it colored most things for me, especially all the things I saw at night. Perhaps it would otherwise have taken these things a lot longer to penetrate me. My interest in the freedom of sexual matters was still not great. Now these unbelievably hard and ruthless depictions threw me into the sexual world, and I regarded this world as true. I would never have dreamt of doubting its truth. And just as one sees certain landscapes only through the eye of certain painters, so too I saw Berlin through the eyes of George Grosz.

I was swept off my feet by this first viewing and also terrified, so deeply that I could not part with the folder when Ibby came by and saw the watercolors, which I had found as loose pages in the folder and spread across the table. She had never seen me with anything like this, and she found it funny: "You've become a Berliner very quickly," she said. "In Vienna, you were crazy about death masks, and now . . ." She spread her arm over the paintings, as though I had gathered them on the table cautiously and with some deliberate plan. "You know," she said, "Grosz likes this. When he's drunk, he talks about 'ass.' He means women, and he looks at you in such a strange way. I pretend I don't understand. But he sings a hymn to 'ass.'"

I was beside myself: "That's not true! He hates this! That's why his things are so good. Do you believe I would look at them if what you said were true?"

"*You* don't like that," she said. "I know, I know. That's why I can tell you everything. But he *does* like it! Wait till you see him drunk and he starts carrying on about 'ass.'"

It was characteristic of Ibby that she could say this. She used the word *ass,* and there was no mistaking what she meant: Grosz, being drunk, had tried to make a pass at her and

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sung the praises of her physicality, an action that might have offended or at least annoyed other women like her. The word *ass* referred to her; she repeated it, and it sounded as if it had nothing to do with her. She remained unmoved, as if he had never gotten too close for comfort, as if all that interested her was the unvarnished report that she gave me.

That was why she had wanted me to come to Berlin—so she could tell me everything. She was pursued by men; wherever she appeared, they would get personal. Three or four men tried it at the same time; one had to succeed. When none of them did succeed, people found her enigmatic. They set up the most abstruse hypotheses, for instance: she was not really a woman, she only looked like one; there was something different about her —her vagina was probably closed up.

One particularly distrustful man named Borchardt, who was in Brecht's circle, declared that she was a spy: "Where does she come from? She popped up out of nowhere. Who is she? She's everywhere and listens to everything." Ibby laughed at his remarks and remained in high spirits. She found him ridiculous, but, so long as she was alone in Berlin, she could not say so to anyone, for these people, who saw everything as permissible, were deadly serious about sexual activity, and they would have greatly resented Ibby's mockery (that was all she felt). She could not live without mockery. She had to, was driven to, express her mockery with wit and verbal surprises. And that was why she hadn't rested until she finally managed to lure me to Berlin.

Common to both of us was an insatiable interest in *every* kind of human being. Her interest was colored by humor, and I enjoyed it when she regaled me with her accounts. But I myself did not really find human variety comical. I found it unsettling. People wriggled in every possible way to communicate. But they failed to understand one another. It was every man for himself. And even though every man did remain alone, notwithstanding all delusions, he kept on wriggling indefatigably.

I listened to all the flagrant misunderstandings that Ibby told me about. I was confronted with many of them myself, but she brought special testimony into my world, things that I as a man could not experience. Beautiful and sought after as she was, she received nothing but the most absurd propositions, as though she herself did not exist, as though there were only a seemingly live statue of her to receive suggestions. Her answers, however, were not heard: they never reached the ears of those men, who cared only about having their say and, if possible, getting what they lusted after. They did not realize why they never succeeded, for they would have been utterly incapable of grasping an answer. Nor would it have interested them to find out anything about their rivals; such information, even though they all seemed to have the same goal, would have been strange and unintelligible to them. For no matter how precisely and inalterably Ibby retained their words and deeds, each man, in order to *understand* them, would have had to disregard himself, and this was something none of them wished to do.

Isaac Babel

A large portion of my memories of Berlin is filled with Isaac Babel. He could not have been there very long, but I feel as if I had seen him every day for weeks on end, for hours and hours; yet we never spoke very much. I was so fond of him—more than any of the countless other people I met—that he has spread out in my memory, which would like to grant him every one of the ninety days of Berlin.

He came from Paris, where his wife, a painter, was studying with André Lhote. He had stayed in various places in France. French literature was his promised land; he regarded de Maupassant as his true master. Gorky had discovered Babel and watched over him; he had counseled Babel in a manner that could not have been wiser and more promising. He had perceived Babel's possibilities and had been intent on helping *him,* not himself, with unselfish criticism, serious and unmocking, knowing quite well how easy it is to destroy

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someone younger, weaker, unknown, before the tyro can know what is in him.

Babel, after traveling abroad for a long time, had stopped off in Berlin on the way back to Russia. I think he was here in late September, actually remaining no more than two weeks. The two books that had made him famous, *Red Cavalry* and *The Odessa Tales,* had both been published in German by the Malik publishing house. I had read the latter book more than once. I could admire him without feeling at all remote from him.

Babel was a small, squat man with a very round head. The first thing you noticed about him were his thick glasses. Perhaps it was these glasses that made his wide-open eyes seem particularly round and gaping. No sooner had he appeared than you felt you were viewed, and, virtually as recompense for so much attention, you told yourself that he looked broad and powerful and by no means feeble—an impression that would have been more consistent with the effect of the glasses.

I first saw him at Schwanecke's, a restaurant that struck me as luxurious, perhaps because people went there at night and after the theater. It would then teem with famous theatrical figures. No sooner had you noticed one than another went by, an even greater celebrity. There were so many celebrities during this efflorescence of the theater that you soon gave up noticing each and every one of them. There were also writers, painters, patrons, critics, and fancy journalists. And Wieland, with whom I had come, was always attentive enough to explain to me who these people were. He had known them all so long already that they made no impact on him. He didn't sound as if he were name-dropping, more as if he were questioning their right to fame, as though they were overrated and would soon vanish from the scene. He had his own horses in the running, the people he had discovered himself, whose books he published and whom he was trying to bring to the attention of the public. Hence he naturally preferred talking about them, and certainly in greater detail. At Schwanecke's in the evening he never sat at a separate table with his loyal followers, dissociating himself from the outside world. Instead, he mingled in larger groups, where friend and foe sat together; here, Wieland looked for someone to attack. He advocated his cause aggressively, not defensively, but he generally didn't stay long, for he had already noticed another group where there was someone who inspired his urge to attack. I soon realized that he was not the only one employing this aggressive method. Then too, there were people who asserted themselves by complaining, and even those who came right into the midst of this noisy turbulence in order to keep quiet—a minority, but a highly conspicuous one: mute, pinched-face islands in the seething landscape, turtles who knew how to drink and whom you had to ask about because they never reacted to any questions.

The first evening that Babel appeared at Schwanecke's, a large group was sitting at a long table in the front room. I had come late and had sat down shyly at the far end of the group, right near the door. I hovered on the edge of my chair as though sliding off and about to vanish. In those days, Russian writers traveled frequently and they liked coming to Berlin; the devil-may-care turbulence suited their temperaments. They were very friendly with Herzfelde, their publisher; he was not their only publisher, but he was certainly the most effective. Any author he brought out was not overlooked; this was impossible, if only because of the jackets designed by his brother. Anya Arkus sat there; people said she was a new poet. She was the most beautiful woman I had ever seen: it sounds incredible, for she had the head of a lynx. I never heard her name again; perhaps she wrote under a different name, perhaps she died early.

I ought to speak about others who sat there, especially those who are forgotten today and whose faces I may be the only one to recall, though without their names. This is not the place to bring them up, however, because that evening was significant for a very special reason; everything else pales next to it. It was the evening when Babel appeared for the first time, a man not distinguished by

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anything that was typical of Schwanecke's. He did not come as an actor of himself. Although lured by Berlin, he was not a "Berliner" in the same sense as the others—he was a "Parisian." The lives of celebrities did not interest him more than other lives, perhaps even less. He felt uncomfortable in the circle of the illustrious, and he tried to get away from it. That was why he turned to the only person here who was unknown and did not belong. This person was I, and the sureness with which Babel recognized this at first sight speaks for his sharp eyes and the staunch clarity of his experience.

I can't remember the first few sentences. I made room for him, he remained standing. He didn't appear determined to stay. Yet he seemed immobile, standing there as if in front of an abysmal fissure, which he knew of and was trying to block. My impression may have been caused partly by his broad shoulders, which were blocking my view of the entrance. I saw no one else who came; I saw only him. He made a dissatisfied face and tossed a few sentences to the Russians at the table. I couldn't tell what his words meant, but they inspired confidence in me. I was certain that he had said something about Schwanecke's, which he disliked no less than I; *he,* however, could say so.

It is possible that I first became aware of my dislike of the place through Babel. For the poetess with the lynx face sat not too far from me, and her beauty made up for everything else. I wanted him to stay; I pinned my hopes on her. Who would not have stayed for her sake? She waved to him and signaled that she wanted to make room for him next to her. He shook his head and pointed his finger at me. This could only mean that I had already offered him a seat; his cordial gesture delighted and confused me. *I* would have sat next to her unhesitatingly, although greatly embarrassed. But he didn't wish to offend me, so he turned her down. I now forced him to sit in my chair and went off in search of another. There was none to be found. I went past every table; I wandered around futilely for a while. By the time I returned empty-handed, Babel was gone. The poetess told me that he hadn't wanted to rob me of my chair, so he had left.

This first act of his, occasioned by myself, may seem unimportant; but it was bound to have a great impact on me. Standing there in his solid, sturdy way, he had reminded me of his *Red Cavalry,* the wonderful and dreadful stories that he had experienced among Cossacks in the Russian-Polish War. Even his dislike of the restaurant, which I thought I had read in his face, fitted in with his stance; and the same man who had gone through those rough, harsh times had now shown such tenderness and consideration toward a very young man, whom he didn't know and whom he now distinguished with his interest.

He was very curious: he wanted to see everything in Berlin. But for him "everything" meant the *people,* and indeed all kinds of people, not those who hung out in the artists' restaurants and the fancy pubs. His favorite place was Aschinger's. There we stood side by side, very slowly eating a pea soup. With his globular eyes behind his thick eyeglasses, he looked at the people around us, every single one, all of them, and he could never get his fill of them. He was annoyed when he finished the soup. He wished for an inexhaustible bowl, for all he wanted to do was keep on looking; and since the people changed rapidly, there was a great deal to see.

I have never met anyone who looked with such intensity. He remained utterly calm; the expression of his eyes changed incessantly because of the play of muscles around them. He rejected nothing when seeing, for he felt equally serious about everything. The most usual as well as the most unusual things were important to him. He felt bored only among the spendthrifts at Schwanecke's or Schlichter's. When I was sitting there and he came in, he would look for me and then sit down nearby. But he wouldn't stay seated for long; very soon, he said: "Let's go to Aschinger's!" And no matter what people I may have been with, I regarded it as the greatest possible honor in Berlin that he liked taking me there. So I stood up and left.

However, it was not the extravagance of

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these fancy restaurants that he carped at when uttering the name "Aschinger." It was the peacock ways of the artists that repelled him. Everyone wanted attention, everyone played himself, the air was simply rigid with heartless vanities. Babel himself was generous; to reach Aschinger's faster, he would take a cab, even for short distances. And when it was time to pay, he would zoom over to the driver and explain to me with exquisite politeness why he *had* to pay. He had just received some money, he said; he was not allowed to take it along, he *had* to spend it in Berlin. And though my instinct told me that none of this could be true, I forced myself to believe him, because I was enchanted with his magnanimity.

Babel never put into words what he thought about my situation: that I was a student and probably not earning anything. I had admitted to him that I hadn't published yet. "That doesn't matter," he had said. "It'll come soon enough." As if it were shameful to have published already. I believe he took me into his care because he empathized with my embarrassment at being among so many trumpets of glory. I said little to him, a lot less than to other people. Nor did he talk very much: he preferred looking at people. He became loquacious in my presence only when the conversation turned to French literature; he admired Stendhal and de Maupassant above anything else.

I thought I would hear a great deal from him about the great Russians, but he must have taken them for granted, or maybe he found it boastful to expatiate on the literature of his own countrymen. But perhaps there was more to it. Perhaps he recoiled from the inevitable shallowness of such a conversation: he himself moved in the language in which the great works of that literature were written, and I had read them at best in translation. We would not have been speaking about the same thing. He took literature so seriously that he must have hated anything vague and approximate. However, my timidity was no weaker than his; I couldn't get myself to say anything to him about *Red Cavalry* or *The Odessa Tales*.

Yet in our conversations about the French, about Stendhal, Flaubert, and de Maupassant, he must have sensed how important *his* stories were to me. For whenever I asked him about anything, my question secretly referred to something of his that I was focusing on. He instantly recognized the tacit reference, and his answer was simple and precise. He saw how satisfied I was; perhaps he even liked the fact that I didn't keep on asking. He spoke about Paris, where his wife had been living for a year. I believe he had just visited her there and was already missing Paris. He preferred de Maupassant to Chekhov, but when I mentioned Gogol (whom I loved more than anything), he said, to my joyful amazement: "That's one thing the French lack—they don't have Gogol." Then he reflected a bit and, to make up for what might have sounded like boasting, he added: "Do the Russians have Stendhal?"

I realize how few concrete things I have to say about Babel, and yet he meant more to me than anyone else I met in Berlin. I saw him together with everything of his that I had read—not much, but it was so concentrated that it colored every moment. And I was also present when he absorbed things in a city that was alien to him, and they were not in his language. He didn't throw around big words and he avoided drawing attention. He could *see* best if he was hidden. He accepted everything from others; he didn't reject things he didn't care for. The things that tormented him most were the things that he allowed to exert the longest effect on him. I knew all this from his Cossack stories; everyone was enthralled by their blood-filled brilliance without being intoxicated by the blood. Here, where he was confronted with the brilliance of Berlin, I could see how indifferent he was to things in which other people bathed in blabbering vanity. He disapproved of any empty reflex; instead, his thirsty eyes lapped up countless people eating their pea soup. One sensed that nothing was easy for him, even though he never said so himself. Literature was sacrosanct to him; he never spared himself and would never have *embellished* anything. Cynicism was alien to him because of

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his strenuous conception of literature. If he found that something was good, he could never have *used* it like other people, who, in sniffing around, implied that they regarded themselves as the culmination of the entire past. Knowing what literature was, he never felt superior to others. He was obsessed with literature, not with its honors or with what it brought in. I do not believe that I saw Babel any differently from what he was because he spoke to me. I know that Berlin would have devoured me like lye if I hadn't met him.

An invitation to emptiness

Everything was equally *close* in Berlin, every kind of effect was permitted: no one was prohibited from making himself noticeable if he didn't mind the strain. For it was no easy matter: the noise was great, and you were always aware, in the midst of noise and tumult, that there were things worth hearing and seeing. Anything went. The taboos, of which there was no lack anywhere, especially in Germany, dried out here. You could come from an old capital like Vienna and feel like a provincial here, and you gaped until your eyes grew accustomed to remaining open.

There was something pungent, corrosive, in the atmosphere; it stimulated and animated. You charged into everything and were afraid of nothing. The terrible adjacency and chaos, such as poured out at you from Grosz's drawings, were by no means exaggerated. They were natural here, a new nature, which became indispensable to you, which you grew accustomed to. Any attempt at shutting yourself off had something perverse about it, and it was the only thing that could still be regarded as perverse. And if you did manage to isolate yourself for a brief while, then you soon felt the itch again, and you plunged into the turbulence. Everything was *permeable,* there was no intimacy. Any intimacy was feigned, and its goal was to surpass some other intimacy. It was not an end in itself.

The animal quality and the intellectual quality, bared and intensified to the utmost, were mutually entangled, in a kind of alternating current. If you had awakened to your own animality before coming here, you had to increase it in order to hold out against the animality of other people; and if you weren't very strong, you were soon used up. But if you were directed by your intellect and had scarcely given in to your animality, you were bound to surrender to the richness of what was offered your mind. These things smashed away at you, versatile, contradictory, and relentless. You had no time to understand anything; you received nothing but strokes. And you hadn't even gotten over yesterday's strokes before the new ones showered upon you. You walked around Berlin like a tender piece of meat, and you felt as if you still weren't tender enough and were waiting for new strokes.

But the thing that impressed me most, the thing that determined the rest of my life, even today, was the *incompatibility* of all the things that broke in on me. Every individual who was something—and many people *were* something—struck away at the others with himself. It was questionable whether they understood him; he made them listen. It didn't seem to bother him that others made people listen in a different way. He had validity as soon as he was heard. And now he had to continue striking away with himself to keep from being supplanted in the ears of the public. Perhaps no one had the leisure to wonder where all this was leading to. In any event, no transparent life came about in this way; but then, this was not the goal. The results were books, paintings, plays, one against the other, crisscross, zigzag.

I was always with someone else, Wieland, Ibby; I never wandered through Berlin alone. This was not the right way to get to know a city, but it may have been suitable in the Berlin of that era. You lived in groups, in cliques; perhaps you couldn't otherwise have endured that harsh existence. You always heard names, usually well-known names: someone was expected, someone came. What *is* a time of brilliance? A time of many great names, all close together, but in such a way that no name suffocates another, even

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though they are fighting one another. The important thing is daily life, steady contact, the blows that brilliance endures without dimming—a lack of sensitivity in regard to these blows, a sort of yearning for them, the joy of exposing oneself to them.

The names *rubbed* together, that was their goal. In a mysterious osmosis, one name tried to filch as much radiance as possible from another name, after which it hurried off to find yet another one very quickly, in order to repeat the same process. The mutual touching and sloughing off of names had something hasty to it, but also something arbitrary; the fun of it was that you never knew which name would come next. This hinged on chance; and since names that were out to make their fortune arrived from everywhere, anything seemed possible.

The curiosity about surprises, about the unexpected or the terrifying, left you in a state of mild intoxication. To endure all these things, to keep from entering a state of total confusion and remaining in it, the people who lived here all the time grew accustomed to taking nothing seriously, especially names. The first person in whom I could observe this process of cynicism about names was someone I saw frequently. His cynicism showed itself, first of all, in his aggressive statements about anyone who had excelled in anything. These statements could appear as expressions of a political standpoint. But in reality, they were something else, namely, a kind of struggle for existence. By acknowledging as little as possible, by hitting out in all directions, you yourself became somebody. Anyone who didn't know how to hit out in all directions was doomed and could simply hit the road: Berlin was nothing for him.

One very important thing was to keep being seen, for days, weeks, and months. The visits to the Romanisches Café (and, on a lofty level, to Schlichter's and Schwanecke's), which were certainly pleasurable, were not meant for pleasure alone. They were also impelled by the need for self-manifestations, a need that no one eluded. If you didn't want to be forgotten, you had to be seen. This obtained for every rank and every stratum, even for any moocher who went from table to table in the Romanisches Café, always getting something so long as he maintained the character he performed and did not tolerate any distortion of it.

An essential phenomenon of Berlin life in those days was the patrons. There were many. They sat around everywhere, lying in wait for customers. A few patrons were always there; others were just visiting. There were some who commuted frequently from Paris. I met my first Maecenas—a man with a mustache, a globular face, and lips revealing a good cuisine—at the Romanisches Café. I was with Ibby. There was little room; a chair was free at our table. The man with the mustache and lips joined us and kept totally quiet. We were talking about Ibby's poems again. She had just been asked for a few. She was reciting them to me. We were trying to decide which ones she ought to show. The man was listening and chuckling as if he understood us. Yet he looked like a menu with nothing but French names. He clicked his tongue several times as if about to speak, but then remained silent. Perhaps he was looking for suitable words. Finally he found them, with the aid of a calling card that he flashed. He was a cigarette manufacturer and lived in Paris, near the Bois de Boulogne. You could look into every worker's pot, he said; you knew what was in it. The pot and its content sounded ominous and explosive. We were both a little frightened. Whereupon he invited us to dinner, well-bred and courteous. We begged off, pleading something important that we had to discuss. He insisted. He said he had something to discuss with us, too. He was so emphatic that curiosity got the better of us and we agreed to dine with him.

He took us to an expensive restaurant that we didn't know. He indulged in a few rhetorical flourishes about the French cuisine, mentioned Baden-Baden, where he came from, and then asked me quite discreetly whether he could offer the young poetess a monthly pension of two hundred marks for one year. A tiny amount, almost nothing, he said, but it was a heartfelt need. He said not a word

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about the poems he had heard. It sufficed for him that he didn't understand them. He had seen Ibby for the first time in his life just one hour ago. She was beautiful, certainly, and when she recited her poems her Hungarian German also sounded seductive. But I doubt that he had an organ for it. When Ibby, in response to my rather chilly question, agreed to accept his offer, he gratefully kissed her hand—and that was the only liberty he took. Yet this was a man in the best years of his life, and he knew what he wanted (not just in regard to menus). His goal here, however, was to be a patron of the arts; that was what he had wanted to discuss with us. He kept his word, and, since he was never in Berlin, he never attempted to force himself on Ibby.

I distinguished between the loud and the silent patrons; this one was a silent patron. Their loudness depended on whether they could have a say; for this, they had to be familiar with the jargon of the circle that they bankrolled. In the group around George Grosz and the Malik people, one often saw a young man whose name I have forgotten. He was rich and noisy and wanted to be taken seriously. He participated in conversations and liked to argue. Perhaps he knew something about a few subjects, but the first thing I got to hear from him was the Glass-of-Water Theory. This theory was making the rounds; there was nothing more hackneyed in all Berlin. But when he spoke about it, he really picked up an empty glass, brought it to his lips, pretended to drain it, and scornfully put it down on the table: "Love? A glass of water, drained, done with!" He had a blond mustache, which puffed up slightly in pride: every time he came out with the Glass-of-Water Theory the mustache bristled. This young man was a high-style backer; perhaps he helped to support the Malik publishing house. At any rate, he was a patron of George Grosz.

A truly silent Maecenas, who never had his say because he understood so much about his own field that he didn't want to say stupid things about other fields, was a youngish man named Stark, who had something to do with Osram lightbulbs. He was often around, listening carefully to everything, saying nothing, and sometimes making himself useful when it seemed imperative—but he was always restrained, never making a splash. In a building owned by him or his firm at the center of Berlin there was a vacant apartment, three lovely rooms in a row. He offered this apartment to Ibby for a few months (it wouldn't be vacant after that). The rooms, with wall-to-wall carpeting, were totally empty. He put in a couch for her to sleep on. That was all: everything else was up to her.

She had the graceful idea of leaving the apartment empty, not getting a single piece of furniture, and inviting people into her emptiness. "You have to *say* the furniture," she said. "I want inventive guests." To support their inventiveness, a small porcelain donkey grazed on the green carpet in the middle room. It was a very pretty donkey. She had seen it in the window of an antique store, had gone in and offered to write a poem about the donkey in exchange for getting it. "Brecht a car, me a donkey. Which do you prefer?" she asked me, knowing quite well what my answer would be. The proprietress of the store had agreed to the barter (there were such people in Berlin), and Ibby was so astonished that she wrote her "best poem" for the woman—it was lost.

Ibby threw a huge housewarming. Each guest was first led to the donkey, introduced to it, and then asked to have a seat wherever he liked. There was no chair anywhere in the apartment; the guests stood or sat down on the floor. Drinks were taken care of: there were patrons for such things, too. Everyone showed up. No one who had heard about the empty apartment wanted to miss it. But the odd thing was that everyone remained—no one left. Ibby asked me to watch George Grosz. She was afraid he'd get drunk and attack her, saying all the things that I refused to believe he said. When he came, he was enchanting, in his most dandyish elegance. He brought along someone who was loaded up with bottles for Ibby. "Too bad," said Ibby, "that I don't fall in love. Today it's all starting charmingly. But just wait!"

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We didn't have to wait too long. Grosz was already drunk when he came, playing the *élégant*. He sat on the day couch. Ibby sat on the floor not too far from him. He stretched out his arms to her, she recoiled so that he couldn't reach her. Then he blew up and there was no stopping him: "You don't let anyone get to you! No one gets anything from you! What's going on?" He went on in this way, and he grew even worse. Then he switched over to singing the praises of "ass." "Ass, ass, you're my delight!" She had predicted this after my very first visit to him, when I had returned with the *Ecce Homo* folder that he had given to me. I had been full of enthusiasm about him, full of veneration for the sharpness of his eye, his relentless scourging of this Berlin society. There he sat now, crimson, drunken, uncontrollably excited because Ibby had turned him down in front of all these people, who weren't even offended by his behavior, his shameless cursing—and all at once he seemed to me like one of the characters in his drawings.

I couldn't stand it. I was in despair. I was furious at Ibby for putting him in this state, knowing what would happen. I wanted to get away. I was the only guest who didn't feel comfortable here. I sneaked out, but I didn't escape, for Ibby, who had kept her eye on me all the while, was already at the door, blocking my way. She was afraid. She had provoked the entire scene to show me that he really did act toward her as she had told me. However, his outburst was so powerful and so long-lasting that she now feared him. She, who was never afraid, who had managed to get out of countless bad situations (she had told me about all of them, I knew about all of them)—Ibby now didn't dare remain in the apartment, which was full of people, if I didn't stay to protect her. Now I hated her because I couldn't leave her alone. Now I had to remain and watch one of the few people I admired in Berlin, a man who had been magnanimous to me and had acted the way I still expected people to act—I had to watch him demean himself and I had to make sure that Ibby was concealed from him and didn't come within his reach. It was so horrible listening to him rage that I would rather she had left with him. No one seemed surprised at his conduct, nor did anyone laugh. People were used to these scenes; they were part of daily life here. I just wanted to get away from there, far away, and since I couldn't get out of the apartment, I wanted to get away from Berlin.

Escape

That was late in September. At the end of August, Ibby and I had attended the premiere of *The Threepenny Opera*. It was a cunning performance, coldly calculated. It was the most accurate expression of this Berlin. The people cheered for *themselves:* this was they, and they liked themselves. First they fed their faces, then they spoke of right and wrong. No one could have put it better about them. They took these words literally. Now it had been spoken; they felt as snug as a bug in a rug. Penalty had been abolished: the royal messenger rode in on a real horse. The shrill and naked self-complacence that this performance emanated can be believed only by the people who witnessed it.

If it is the task of satire to lash people for the injustice that they devise and commit, for their evils, which turn into predators and multiply, then, on the contrary, this play glorified all the things that people usually conceal in shame. However, the thing that was most cogently and most effectively scorned was pity. To be sure, everything was merely taken over and spiced up with several new crassnesses; but these crassnesses were what made it so authentic. It was no opera, nor was it what it had originally been: a parody of opera. The only unadulterated thing about it was that it was an operetta. In opposition to the saccharine form of Viennese operetta, in which people found, undisturbed, everything they wished for, this was a different form, a Berlin form, with harshness, knavery, and their banal justifications—things that they wished for no less ardently, that they probably wished for even more than the saccharine things.

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Ibby had no feeling for the piece and was no less astonished than I by the raging spectators, who stormed up to the apron of the stage and were so enthusiastic that they were ready to smash everything to smithereens. "Gangster romanticism," she said. "It's all false." And even though I was thankful to her and felt the same word, "false," and used it, we each meant something very different by it. Her idea, which was more original than the play, was that everyone would like to be one of these false beggar characters but was too cowardly to do it. She saw successful forms of hypocrisy, useful whininess, which you held in your hand and manipulated, and the whole thing was placed under a control that allowed you to have your fun but exempted you from the responsibility. I saw it in far simpler terms: everyone knew himself to be Mack the Knife, and now he was at last openly declared as such and approved and admired for it. Our opinions went past one another, but, since they didn't touch, they didn't disturb one another, and they strengthened our defenses.

On that evening I felt closest to Ibby. Nothing could faze her. The raging crowd of the audience didn't exist for her. She never felt drawn into a crowd. She never even considered public opinions: it was as if she had never heard them. She walked untouched through Berlin's sea of posters. No name of any item stuck in her mind. If she needed anything for daily life, she didn't know its name or where to find it; and at the department store she had to ask about both in the most haphazard way. Watching a demonstration of one hundred thousand people passing before her very eyes, she felt neither attracted nor repelled; anything she said right afterwards was in no way different from her words beforehand. She had watched carefully and grasped more details than anyone else; yet nothing added up to a direction, an intention, a compulsion.

In this Berlin, which was filled with violent political struggles, Ibby never said a single word about politics. Perhaps this was because she could never repeat what other people said. She read no newspapers, she read no magazines either. If I saw a periodical in her hand, I knew that it had printed a poem of hers which she wanted to show me. I was always right; and when I asked her what else was in the same issue she shook her head in total ignorance. I often found this unpleasant and accused her of having a big ego. I said she acted as if she were alone in the world. But this was unfair of me, for she noticed more about people—all sorts of people—than anyone else did. It puzzled me that she never let herself be swept up by a crowd; at the premiere of *The Threepenny Opera* I liked the very thing about her that I had often criticized.

I had seen many things in Berlin that stunned and confused me. These experiences have been transformed, transported to other locales, and, recognizable only by me, have passed into my later writings. It goes against my grain to reduce something that now exists in its own right and to trace it back to its origin. This is why I prefer to cull only a few things from those three months in Berlin—especially things that have kept their recognizable shape and have not vanished altogether into the secret labyrinth from which I would have to extricate them and clothe them anew.

Unlike many people, particularly those who have surrendered to a loquacious psychology, I am not convinced that one should plague, pester, and pressure memory or expose it to the effects of well-calculated lures. I bow to memory, every person's memory. I want to leave memory intact, for it belongs to the man who exists for his freedom. And I do not veil my dislike for those who perform a beauty operation on a memory until it resembles anyone else's memory. Let them operate on noses, lips, ears, skin, hair as much as they like; let them—if they must—implant eyes of different colors, even transplant hearts that manage to beat along for another year; let them touch, trim, smooth, plane everything—but just let memory be.

Having made this profession of faith, I wish to tell about things I still see clearly; I do not wish to seek any further twilight.

When the era found itself in its common denominator, *The Threepenny Opera,* when

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the joy of feeding your face before talking of right and wrong became a household slogan on which all the conflicting forces could agree—at this point, my resistance began to organize itself. Until then, I had felt more and more tempted to stay in Berlin. You moved in a chaos, but it seemed immeasurable. Something new happened every day, smashing at the old, which had itself been new just three days earlier. Things floated like corpses in the chaos, and human beings became things. This was known as *Neue Sachlichkeit* ("New Thingness"). Little else could be possible after the long and drawn-out shrieks of Expressionism.

Nevertheless, whether a man was still shrieking or had already become a thing, he knew how to live well. If you arrived fresh and still didn't let on your confusion even after several weeks, but instead flaunted a clear mind, then you were considered useful and you received good offers which lured you to remain. You latched on to any newcomer, if only because he wouldn't be new for long. You welcomed newcomers with open arms while looking around for other newcomers; the existence and efflorescence of this era, which was great in its way, hinged on the incessant arrival of the new. You were still nothing, and yet already you were needed. You moved chiefly among people who had likewise been new.

You were considered old-and-established if you had an "honest" profession; the most honest profession (not only in my eyes) was always that of a physician. Neither Döblin nor Benn[1] was part of the scene. Their work kept them from the routine of incessant self-flaunting. I saw them so rarely and so fleetingly that I have nothing substantial to say about them. But I was struck all the more by the way people talked about them. Brecht, who acknowledged no one, spoke Döblin's name with the greatest respect. A few rare times I saw him unsure of himself; he would then say: "I've got to talk to Döblin about that." He made Döblin sound like a wise man from whom he sought counsel.

Benn, who liked Ibby, was the only man who didn't pester her. She gave me a New Year's card that he had sent her: he wished her everything that a beautiful young woman would like to have and he listed these things individually. His list contained nothing that Ibby would ever have thought of. He had judged her by her appearance, and he adhered to this impression. Thus the card, which had absolutely nothing to do with her, seemed to come from some unconsumed writer who was sure of his senses.

I could have remained as a "newcomer," and, regarding my external progress, I would surely have been well off. A certain generosity was part of this bustle. Nor was it so easy to say no when people cordially pressed you to stay. I was in an unusual situation: not only did I have clear sailing to reach anyone, but Ibby's stories had informed me about people in a way that would have been beyond anyone else's reach. She knew people from their most laughable sides; her observations were ruthless, but also accurate. Never did she report anything false or approximate; whatever she hadn't seen or heard herself did not exist for her. She was the *desirable* eyewitness, who had more to say than others because it is this witness's chief experience to stand back.

During the weeks after the premiere, when the urge to escape this world began to articulate itself, I stuck to Ibby. I told her I had to return to Vienna for my examinations; I would then get my doctorate in the spring. That was how it had been planned. Then in summer of the next year I could come back to Berlin and make up my mind, depending on what I felt like doing. She was unsentimental. She said: "You'll never commit yourself. You can't commit yourself. With you it's the way it is with me in regard to love." She meant that she wouldn't let anyone talk her into anything, inveigle her, or seduce her. She also felt that it was clever to have the examinations ahead of me. "They'll understand, these artists! Four years of drudging in a lab and then not getting a doctorate—they'd think you were crazy. Forget it!"

She had a good supply of poems. I had turned a whole stock of them into German,

1 Two writers who were physicians.

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more than she would need for a year. The cigarette man who had listened to our discussion of her poems had set up her pension for a year; two checks had arrived so far, accompanied by a cordial and respectful card.

She made things easy for me, as I had assumed she would do. While we weren't lovers (we had never even kissed), all the people we had spoken about stood physically between us, a forest that kept growing, that could not die for her or for me. Both of us were poor letter-writers. She must have written me, and I sometimes wrote her too; but how meager this was when we couldn't see one another and listen to one another.

Then, three weeks after the premiere, came the *soirée* in her empty apartment; the shock destroyed the magic of her stories.

I began to be ashamed of the things I had heard from her about other people. I realized that she led men on merely in order to tell me about it. When I finally understood that the freshness, originality, and accuracy of her accounts were connected to the fact that she provoked men to make fools of themselves for her stories—of which I couldn't hear my fill—when I finally admitted to myself that I had never, literally not once, heard anything *in favor of* any man, and only because any favorable remark would have sounded boring, I suddenly felt a dislike for her and exchanged her mockery for Babel's silence.

During my last two weeks in Berlin, I saw Babel every day. I saw him alone; I felt freer with him alone; I believe he preferred seeing me alone, too. I learned from him that one can gaze for a very long time without knowing something, that one can tell only much later whether one knows something about a person: only after losing sight of him. I learned that nevertheless, without knowing something as yet, you can carefully note everything you see or hear, and things lie dormant in you so long as you don't misuse them to entertain other people.

I learned something else, which may have seemed even more important after my lengthy apprenticeship with *Die Fackel*: I learned how wretched judging and condemning are as ends in themselves. Babel taught me a way of looking at people: gazing at them for a long time, as long as they were to be seen, without breathing a single word about what you saw. I saw the slowness of this process, the restraint, the muteness, right next to the importance Babel placed on what could be seen; for he sought tirelessly and greedily—his only greed, but also mine, except that mine was untrained and not yet certain of its justification.

Perhaps we met in a word that was never spoken between us, but which keeps crossing my mind when I think about him. It is the word *learn.* Both of us were filled with the dignity of learning. His mind and my mind had been aroused by early learning, by an immense respect for learning. However, his learning was already completely devoted to human beings; he needed no pretext—neither the expansion of a field of knowledge nor alleged usefulness, purpose, planning—in order to "learn" people.

At this time, I, too, seriously turned to people; and since then I have spent the greater part of my life trying to understand human beings. Back then I had to tell myself that I was doing so for the sake of some bit of knowledge or other. But when all other pretexts crumbled, I was left with the excuse of *expectation:* I wanted people, including myself, to become *better,* and so I had to know absolutely everything about every single human being. Babel, with his enormous experience—although he was only eleven years my senior—had long since gotten beyond this point. His desire for an improvement of mankind did not serve as an excuse for knowing human beings. I sensed that his desire was as insatiable as mine, but that it never caused him to deceive himself. Anything he found out about human beings was independent of whether it delighted or tormented him, whether it struck him to the ground: he had to "learn" human beings.

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Postmodern: art and culture in the 1980s

by Hilton Kramer

We live now amidst the ruins of a civilization, but most of these ruins are in our minds.
—John Lukacs, *The Passing of the Modern Age*

We do not nowadays refute our predecessors, we pleasantly bid them good-bye.
—George Santayana, *Character and Opinion in the United States*

Nothing has been more remarkable in the cultural life of the past decade than the speed with which the imperatives of the modern movement have been stripped of their authority. Twenty years ago it was rank heresy to suggest that modernism might already have entered upon its decline. The assumption was that the modernist spirit was not to be construed as a period phenomenon, but as a permanent and irreversible condition of cultural life. Ten years ago it was still controversial, though no longer unthinkable, to claim that a decisive break had already occurred. Defections from modernist orthodoxy were too widespread to be discounted, yet there was a distinct reluctance to explore—or even, indeed, to acknowledge—their implications. Today, however, it is suddenly chic to speak of a "postmodernist" art, and scandal no longer attaches to the idea that modernism has run its course. Even the stoutest defenders of the old absolutes concede that *something* has happened.

It was to be expected, of course, that modernism would be significantly modified once its tenets came to dominate the culture it had long sought to topple and displace. Modernism was born, after all, in a spirit of criticism and revolt. It was predicated on the existence of an official culture—at once bourgeois in its origin, unenlightened in its intellectual outlook, and philistine in its taste—that would remain adamant in its resistance to fundamental change. (Never mind that this view of bourgeois culture was something of a fiction, omitting as it did all reference to the complexity and dynamism of its achievements. It was a fiction that served to strengthen the conviction of the avant-garde that bourgeois culture had forfeited its right to exist.) What in fact happened, however, did not conform to the myth of bourgeois resistance to change. In due course, bourgeois culture adroitly accommodated itself to virtually every aesthetic challenge mounted by its avant-garde adversaries. What was condemned in one generation was embraced in the next. The periodic transformation of the "accursed" into the accepted and then, more often than not, into the official and beloved soon became fixed as the pattern by which bourgeois culture sustained itself. Thus, through a series of enlightened adjustments and measured increments, the *révolté* impulses of the avant-garde were absorbed into the cultural mainstream.

Once established, this pattern of challenge and assimilation was bound to alter the out-

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look of both parties. Each came to have a stake in the power and vitality of the other. Like partners in a stormy but enduring marriage, the avant-garde and the bourgeoisie came more and more to depend on each other and even to resemble each other. The avant-garde developed a keen sense of how far it could go—or, as Jean Cocteau shrewdly put it, of how far it could go in going too far—without causing some irreversible rupture. Bourgeois culture, for its part, acquired a finely developed sense of what could be absorbed and what deferred. For this process of selection and adjudication, it created special institutions—museums and exhibition societies, schools, publications, foundations, etc.—which functioned, in effect, as agencies of a licensed opposition. This was something new in the history of Western culture—bourgeois liberalism's most distinctive political contribution to the life of culture.

The consequences of this institutionalization of the avant-garde proved to be more profound than either party could have foreseen. For the dissident avant-garde it secured a fixed position in the cultural system. For the system itself it provided a steady source of new energy and ideas—a dynamism analogous to that of the economic and political life of bourgeois society. Much—if not quite everything—that we continue to esteem in the creative achievements of the last two centuries owes its existence to this curious compact between the bourgeoisie and its licensed opposition. But the dynamism of the avant-garde, with its unremitting appetite for innovation and its steady erosion of established values—including the values established by its own efforts—came in time to exert a powerful control over the very culture it still ostensibly "opposed." So completely did bourgeois society cede its cultural initiatives to this licensed opposition that the terms of their compact came to be fatefully altered. It was now the avant-garde that dominated cultural life—thus, in effect, ceasing to function as an authentic avant-garde—and the surviving remnants of bourgeois "reaction" that went through the motions of a principled resistance.

This, essentially, is the course that has brought us into the "postmodern" era. The culture of modernism has triumphed in the schools, in the marketplace, in the media, and in virtually every other citadel of opinion and influence. Yet this triumph has proved to be remarkably hollow—a victory that is, in some respects, indistinguishable from defeat. For something very odd happened to the culture of modernism while it was achieving its unexpected ascendancy over our institutions and our tastes. It was, so to speak, subverted from within. It developed an unmistakable affinity—even a certain envy and nostalgia—for the bourgeois culture it had worked so hard to discredit. It acquired a yearning for what had been destroyed. To satisfy this yearning, it launched itself on a program of excavating the ruins of the very civilization it had buried. And in true romantic fashion, the discoveries it made among the ruins of that civilization were promptly upheld as models of excellence and guides to creation.

The revival of nineteenth-century Salon painting and Beaux-Arts architecture, the sweeping revaluation of German romantic painting and of the American artists of the Hudson River School, the elevation of Victorian and Pre-Raphaelite art, and the boom in Art Nouveau design and even in Art Deco ornament—these are but the most spectacular symptoms of a craving that is central to the whole aesthetic outlook of postmodernist art. About these revivals of bourgeois art and design, which now enjoy such impressive critical favor, it is sometimes said that they signify little more than the gyrations of the art market and the special tastes of a generation of art historians too young to have participated in the classic battles of modernism. There may be some truth in this, but as an explanation it does not take us very far. Neither the art market nor the world of scholarship on which it depends functions in a void. They too are subject to the pressures that shape the life of culture. A reversal of this magnitude requires a larger perspective. For what, after all, is being sought out in these revivals of bourgeois styles? What, indeed, does it mean to revive a discredited style?

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We may take it as axiomatic in our culture that every revival of a style involves something more than style. All revivals are governed by the sense of loss that overtakes our culture when it comes to feel that its ambitions are faltering and its momentum declining. What determines the course of a revival is not so much the study of the past, which only accelerates in a particular direction when the need for it is keenly felt, as the present condition of culture itself. A revival of bourgeois art would have been unthinkable, for example, in the heyday of the Abstract Expressionist movement. It had to wait for the breakdown and de-mystification of the modernist ethos that came in the 1960s. This brought with it not only certain changes in contemporary style—the most important of which was the emergence of Pop art—but a decisive shift away from the attitude of high seriousness that had long been a fundamental component of the modernist outlook. It was only then, in the more "swinging" and accommodating atmosphere created by this shift in attitude, that the revival of bourgeois styles would be permitted to flourish without impediments or constraints.

In this altered atmosphere, the traditions governing nineteenth-century bourgeois art and architecture were seen to embody a great many envied qualities and capacities. They were taken, indeed, to represent a better world than ours—specifically, the world as it was seen to exist before it had been systematically stripped of its pretensions and extravagances (and thus of its fun!) by the dour moral injunctions of modernism. What was now admired in these rediscovered styles of the last century had nothing whatever to do with a strict aesthetic probity, the traditional hallmark of the modernist outlook. On the contrary, it was their freedom from modernist constraints—from modernist "conscience"—that commended these styles to their new admirers. The productions of bourgeois art were now admired for their amplitude and flamboyance, for their easy access to grand gestures and a showy sociability, even for their mediocrity and frivolity. What appealed also was their high technical proficiency combined with an unembarrassed espousal of sentiment, anecdote, and declamatory rhetoric. In the period that saw Andy Warhol emerge as the very model of the new artist-celebrity, moreover, sheer corniness was no longer looked upon as a failure of sensibility, nor was superficiality—or even vulgarity—regarded as a fault. Bad taste might even be taken as a sign of energy and vitality, and "stupid art"—as its champions cheerfully characterized some of the newer styles that began to flourish in the late Seventies and early Eighties—could be cherished for its happy repudiation of cerebration, profundity, and critical stringency. Try to imagine Arshile Gorky or Mark Rothko or Robert Motherwell countenancing such a turnabout in attitudes and you have a vivid sense of the differences separating the last stages of modernist orthodoxy from the very different moral climate of postmodernist art.

What is essential to understand about this "reactionary" phenomenon is that it is itself a creation of modernist culture—albeit, of modernism at the end of its tether. It is not the work of aesthetic conservatives. Salon painting and Beaux-Arts architecture had always retained their popularity among the so-called philistines even when the tide of modernist influence was running high. But this philistine element, despite its commanding numbers, was incapable of exerting any real pressure on the course of the culture from which it felt itself spiritually estranged. Its outlook was backward, in any case, and its energies numbed. Even its negativism was more a matter of sentiment than of ideas. It could withhold support—and did—but when it came to artistic initiatives of its own it had nothing to offer.[1] The revival of bourgeois art was thus left for the modernists themselves to

1 Thus the attempt of Huntington Hartford to revive the Pre-Raphaelites when he founded the Gallery of Modern Art in the early 1960s came to nothing. What Hartford's efforts demonstrated was that it was not the art itself but the attitude one adopted toward it that was the critical factor in negotiating a revival.

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carry out, and this naturally determined its outcome. It guaranteed that the revival would convert bourgeois art into terms compatible with modernist taste.

Exactly how this conversion was accomplished tells us much about the inner dynamic of modernist sensibility, especially its tendency to empty art of its "content" and establish style as its true subject matter. (That we feel obliged to place the word "content" in quotation marks is itself a reflection of this tendency.) For the purposes of this conversion, no instrument has proved to be more powerful or more pervasive than the attitude of irony we call Camp, which has the effect of neutralizing the substance and aggrandizing the style of whatever it embraces. Irony ridicules, of course, and ridicule normally wounds and discredits. But the ridicule of Camp is a mock ridicule that contains a large element of praise, accommodation, and affection. Irony of this special sort places us in a relation of comic intimacy with the objects of its attention. It encloses them in an atmosphere of flirtation and familiarity. The antagonism normally associated with the ironic attitude is merely feigned. By focusing on what is truly outrageous in these objects, and then lavishing a fulsome solicitude upon precisely that aspect of them, Camp makes a joke of the offending attributes while at the same time suggesting that there is something endearing—even, perhaps, something necessary and redeeming—in their very absurdity.[2]

Camp, in short, confers legitimacy on what it pretends to ridicule. But the kind of legitimacy it confers is distinctly double-edged. For what it offers to the cognoscenti —a "forbidden" pleasure in objects that are corny, exaggerated, "stupid," or otherwise acknowledged to have failed by the respectable standards of the day—is not at all the same as what it bequeaths to the "straight" public that believes itself to be abiding by those very standards. The Camp attitude thus works to preserve modernism's distinction between the avant-garde and the philistines —between "us" and "them"—even while engaged in the task of reviving the philistine art that the avant-garde had formerly consigned to oblivion. The same act of rehabilitation that allows "us" to enjoy the inanities of Salon painting as absurd comedy also supplies "them" with new masterpieces to admire without irony. In that division of taste lies the essence of the revival of nineteenth-century bourgeois art.

The gratifications of Camp are all the sweeter, of course, because of this success in persuading an eager public to accept its jokes as the real thing. This is something the public readily consents to do, usually with gratitude and a sigh of relief, a feeling that it has at last had restored to it the kind of art it can really understand and respond to. To the delight and astonishment of the public, it also seems the modish thing to do. From the Camp point of view, however, "they" still understand nothing since "they" don't get the joke. The esoteric pleasures to be derived from the art remain a sort of cult possession. (Thus, though the avant-garde may have ceased to exist *as* an avant-garde, its spirit lives on in this power to "nominate" the objects of esoteric delectation.) And it is not only the "lay" public that can be counted on to respond to the stratagems of Camp sensibility. Even more essential to their success is the alacrity with which the professional art world falls into line. The whole apparatus of curators, dealers, critics, art historians, and collectors, having been rigorously schooled by the lessons of modernism to be on the alert for a new trend to exploit, promptly goes into action, organizing exhibitions, making "discoveries," creating new reputations and new markets, etc., while remaining oblivious to the comic implications of its new role in the postmodern scenario and indifferent to the corruption of standards that results from its efforts.

The implications of this phenomenon are by no means simply comical, however. Much

2 We are thus reminded that the origin of Camp is to be found in the sub-culture of homosexuality. Camp humor derives, in its essence, from the homosexual's recognition that his condition represents a kind of joke on nature, a denial of its imperatives, and thus a mode of psychological artifice.

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is at stake in the outcome. And what is primarily at stake is the concept of seriousness. Against the concept of seriousness, Camp invokes an alternative standard—the facetious, which has proved to have a far more insidious power to shape the course of culture than anyone has yet acknowledged. (Not the least of its power lies in the fact that it is not taken seriously enough to examine.) The facetious does not repudiate high culture in favor of its middlebrow or lowbrow substitutes, but on the contrary remains devoted to it, as the parasite remains devoted to its host, and prospers by cheerfully degrading its characteristic modes of discourse. These, as Marcel Duchamp was the first to demonstrate, are in fact essential to the facetious outlook, but toward them—and the concept of seriousness they embody—it adopts an attitude of blithe impiety and insouciance. (Andy Warhol remains the outstanding example in the visual arts, John Cage in music, John Ashbery in poetry, and Donald Barthelme in prose fiction. The later work of Philip Johnson is the most celebrated example in architecture.) The strategy of the facetious in relation to the serious is not a strategy of direct attack but a strategy of inversion.

It is worth recalling, in this context, that in her famous "Notes on 'Camp'" Susan Sontag described Camp as "the sensibility of failed seriousness." Now this embrace of "failed seriousness" was not to be construed as a failure of mind. It was deemed to be an accomplishment of mind—a mode of aesthetic transcendence. It was welcomed as one of the essential preconditions for achieving what Miss Sontag, in another of her definitions of Camp, spoke of as "the consistently esthetic experience of the world." In contrast to the sensibility of high culture, which she found to be "basically moralistic," Miss Sontag upheld Camp sensibility as "wholly esthetic." Camp was indeed acclaimed as "a solvent of morality."

"Notes on 'Camp,'" the pronouncement that marked the successful entry of Camp into the realm of established culture, was first published in *Partisan Review* in 1964 at the very moment when Pop art was taking the art world—and the media—by storm. (It was this pronouncement that made Miss Sontag herself a media figure.) This important essay can now be seen to have performed for critical discourse a service very much akin to that which Pop art performed for the fine arts. It severed the link between high culture and high seriousness that had been a fundamental tenet of the modernist ethos. It released high culture from its obligation to be entirely serious, to insist on difficult standards, to sustain an attitude of unassailable rectitude. It relaxed the tension that had always existed between the fierce moral imperatives of modernism—its critical conscience—and its appetite for novel aesthetic gratifications.[3] "The whole point of Camp," Miss Sontag wrote, "is to dethrone the serious," thereby defining the special temper of postmodernist culture.

It was thus in the 1960s that there was launched on a significant public scale the whole complex of attitudes that signaled the decline of the modernist outlook and its absorption into the looser, less stringent, and more avowedly hedonistic and opportunistic standards of postmodernist culture. Art historians, bemused by a development that effectively dissolves the standards on which their whole intellectual enterprise is founded —for Camp also severs the link between connoisseurship and the concept of quality— have not shown much of an inclination to explore this fateful turn in our artistic affairs. Interestingly, it is the architectural historians who have faced up to the matter with more candor, and it is in the architectural literature that some of these salient meanings of postmodernist culture can be most clearly glimpsed.

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3 "Ordinarily we value a work of art because of the seriousness and dignity of what it achieves," Miss Sontag wrote. "But," she added, "there are other creative sensibilities besides the seriousness (both tragic and comic) of high culture. . . . And one cheats oneself, as a human being, if one has *respect* only for the style of high culture, whatever else one may do or feel on the sly."

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In Charles Jencks's *Modern Movements in Architecture* (1973), for example, there is an admirably plain-spoken account of the pivotal role of Camp in the new architecture of the Sixties. With appropriate acknowledgements to Miss Sontag, Mr. Jencks observes that "the Camp attitude is essentially a mental set towards all sorts of objects which *fail from a serious* point of view." He goes on:

> Instead of condemning these failures, [the Camp attitude] partially contemplates them and partially enjoys them. . . . it tries to outflank all the other stereotyped views of failure which are morbid or moralistic and substitute a sort of cheerful openmindedness. It starts from failure and then asks what is left to enjoy, to salvage. It is realistic, because it accepts monotony, cliché and the habitual gestures of a mass-production society as the norm without trying to change them. It accepts stock response and ersatz without protest, not only because it enjoys both, finding them "real," but because it seeks to find those usually disregarded moments of interest (the fantastic hidden in the banal). Thus the epitome "it's so bad that it's good," which accepts the classifications of traditional culture but reverses the verdict.[4]

Mr. Jencks is an exceptionally intelligent critic, and while he is not unsympathetic to certain aspects of Camp architecture, he has a very clear view of its character, and remains undeceived about its quality. He understands very well that Camp represents a collapse of standards, and he knows, too, what this collapse brings in its wake. "The Camp artist . . ." writes Mr. Jencks, "sends up his critics with the riposte 'there are no rules, anything goes,' cheerfully shuffles form regardless of content (with an eye on the audience) and does not try to produce integrated, serious works. He is content to remain in farce, in sin, in short, in Camp."

In Mr. Jencks's account, the cynicism of the Camp attitude is patent, and so is the narcissism that it engenders. The Camp architect, he writes, "knows (in his candid moments) that his works are not the profound jewels he sells them as. This is the point that must be stressed to avoid confusion: candor. The Camp architect admits at once that whoever he is, it is much more important than whatever he does." Under the Camp dispensation, the only effective standard is notoriety, not quality, and criticism surrenders to the exigencies of publicity. "One must cultivate naïvety and forgetfulness," Mr. Jencks writes, "because the memory of fashion cycles has to be short-lived if the process is to go on. In fact comparison with the past and a critical temper upset the process at once." No wonder, then, that Susan Sontag called her first volume of essays—the book that included "Notes on 'Camp'" and in general celebrated the so-called "new sensibility"—*Against Interpretation.*

The "underlying genesis of Camp in architecture," Mr. Jencks points out, lies in "the movement of formalism"—which is to say, in an architectural aestheticism that has divorced itself from its functionalist origins and become pure style. And he unflinchingly traces the course that has led from formalism to Camp—which, in one of its aspects, is formalism become ironical about itself—to the sheerest nihilism. As a kind of centerpiece in this discussion of Camp in contemporary architecture Mr. Jencks gives us a lengthy quotation from a dialogue between Susan Sontag and Philip Johnson, recorded by the BBC in 1965, on the subject of artistic morality. It is in the utterances of Philip Johnson, who began his career as the quintessential formalist and then emerged in the uproar of the Sixties as the undisputed leader of the Camp style, that we hear the chilling voice

4 Isn't this, by the way, a fairly accurate description of the attitude that took possession of a good deal of "serious" movie criticism in the Sixties? The practice of lavishing extravagant praise on failed and even trashy movies from the Camp point of view had probably existed from the time that movies were first produced. But in the Sixties it came to be codified as a respectable critical method, and now virtually dominates the movie reviews in our major newspapers and magazines. This, too, must be counted as an aspect of postmodernist culture.

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which sums up the spiritual bankruptcy of the postmodern era: "What good does it do you to believe in good things? . . . It's feudal and futile. I think it much better to be nihilistic and forget all that. I mean, I know I'm attacked by my moral friends, er, but really don't they shake themselves up over nothing?"

"There thus develops underneath [Camp's] grinning optimism," Mr. Jencks writes, "a strong pessimism: nothing can be changed, we are all determined by the process, it will end in disaster. Camp is eternally hopeful and yet eternally apocalyptic." The cult of the facetious, it appears, leads us straight back to the spiritually impoverished culture of the waste land. Which, it will be remembered, it was one of the foremost functions of the modernist vision to subject to the most stringent moral analysis.

Well, the philistines have certainly had their revenge—even if they have had to leave it to their enemies to secure it for them. Our cities now boast expensive new buildings that remind them—almost—of the good old days. In our museums everything from Salon painting to the inanities of kitsch has been dusted off, freshly labeled, and solemnly placed on exhibition, almost as if the modern movement had never altered our view of them. Scholars can always be found to study these objects, and critics to praise them almost as if they believed them to be worthy of their attention. Almost, but not quite. For history, though it can be revised, can never be repealed, and it is an illusion—one of many illusions induced by the Camp phenomenon—to believe otherwise. We have only to confront the real thing—say, the great Picasso retrospective of 1980 or the Cézanne exhibition of 1977, to name but two of the outstanding events of the last decade—to be reminded of the crucial differences that separate the essentially factitious claims of the postmodern era from the central achievements of modernism itself.

Only now, perhaps, are we in a position to appreciate the extent to which so many postmodern developments in art are actually anti-modernist in spirit, a betrayal of the high purposes and moral grandeur of modernism in its heyday. Philip Johnson's new buildings have removed any last doubts that might have been entertained on this score, and Andy Warhol is now the classic example of the artist who is more important for "what he is" than for "whatever he does." To say that such figures and their many artist-confreres represent a decisive break with the tradition that comes out of Cézanne, Picasso, Matisse, Mondrian, et al. is only to state the obvious.

Yet modernism, though now stripped of the nearly absolute authority it formerly wielded in artistic matters, is anything but dead. It survives as a vital tradition—the only really vital tradition that the art of our time can claim as its own. The revenge of the philistines is anything but complete. Inevitably, our relation to this modernist tradition is not what it once was. We are far more aware than earlier generations needed to be of its many divisions and contradictions and countervailing currents, and more knowledgeable, too, of what is central and what is merely peripheral and even destructive to its creative life. The modern movement was always, perhaps, a more complex and pluralistic phenomenon than its more doctrinaire champions—and, for that matter, its more doctrinaire enemies—could ever bring themselves to recognize. It required a certain historical distance to see it whole—to see what it was, and what it was not. In this respect, at least, postmodernist art has certainly performed a service of sorts, albeit at a great cost in spirit. In a purely negative way, it has placed the modernist heritage in dramatic historical relief, and thus helped to redefine its importance to us. It is, in any case, only in relation to the paradoxes of this situation that the art history of the last decade can be readily understood. Which is also to say that it is only in the differences that separate the imperatives of modernism from those of postmodernist art that the present prospects for art can be clearly discerned.

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F.R. Leavis: a revaluation

by Norman Podhoretz

This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of the birth of *Scrutiny,* the English critical journal that exerted so great an influence on the entire Anglo-American literary world from 1932 until its demise about two decades later. Yet important though *Scrutiny* was, anyone interested in how and why it mattered can more profitably spend his time on the work of its editor and chief contributor, F.R. Leavis, than by reading through the back issues. It is true that many people besides Leavis himself wrote for *Scrutiny* and that a few of the *Scrutiny* regulars—D.W. Harding, L.C. Knights, Marius Bewley, and Q.D. Leavis—were excellent critics in their own right. But it is equally true that they—not to mention their less distinguished fellows—rarely dissented in any significant degree from Leavis's ideas and judgments. *Scrutiny,* in short, *was* Leavis. How could it have been otherwise? So powerful was his influence that no one who ever came near him could escape it; and so dogmatic was he that anyone who disagreed with him about anything was soon banished from the pages of the magazine. Leavis liked to say of his critical judgments that they had been arrived at "not dogmatically but deliberately." In fact, he used this phrase, taken from Dr. Johnson's *Preface to Shakespeare,* as the epigraph to one of his most important books, *The Great Tradition.* But there is something even more comical in Leavis's disclaimer of dogmatism than in Johnson's, particularly in connection with *The Great Tradition,* with its unforgettably audacious first sentence: "The Great English novelists are Jane Austen, George Eliot, Henry James and Joseph Conrad—to stop for the moment at that comparatively safe point in history."

Another thing Leavis liked to say about critical judgment was that it takes the form of the question, "'This is so, isn't it?' the question asking for confirmation that the thing is *so,* but prepared for an answer in the form, 'Yes, but—,' the 'but' standing for corrections, refinements, precisions, amplifications." Yet having studied with Leavis at Cambridge for three years in the early Fifties, I can testify at first hand that nothing could have been farther from the spirit of his own procedure than such an open and easy give-and-take of tentative opinions ready to be revised. And having in the past few months read through nearly all his published writings (including the half-dozen or so books he produced after the demise of *Scrutiny,* which he outlived by twenty-five years), I can hardly imagine anyone other than a sycophantic disciple failing to smile, or even to laugh out loud, at the idea that Leavis ever offered his judgments in the form of a question. The first sentence of *The Great Tradition* is entirely characteristic of Leavis's critical pronouncements, and, whatever else it may be, it is not a question. As for being "prepared for an answer in the form, 'Yes, but—,'" there are many samples scattered throughout his writings of how he responded to disagreement, and at least ninety-nine per cent of them are

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accompanied by scorn, anger, abuse, and righteous claims of misrepresentation.

An especially vivid case involves Leavis's 1962 reply to C.P. Snow's argument (in "The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution") that the attitudes of the literary world had for more than a century been infused by a "Luddite" hostility to industrial civilization. Entering the controversy, which had by then become worldwide, Lionel Trilling sided with Leavis on the substantive issue but chided him for the cruelty of his attack on Snow. Whereupon Leavis shot back: "I have to comment that, in thus lending himself to the general cry that I have 'attacked' Snow . . . Mr. Trilling, who passes as a vindicator of the critical function, seems to me guilty of *la trahison des clercs*." So much for "Yes, but—."

The same ferocity comes out in Leavis's response to Sir Herbert Grierson's disagreement with his negative view of Milton: "What is there to say, then, except that the scholar who commits himself to such pronouncements, distinguished authority on seventeenth-century matters as he certainly is, has no claim to be treated as a critical authority on the verse of the period—or any verse." This of the man whose great anthology of metaphysical poetry, published in 1921, had provided the occasion for an essay by T.S. Eliot (actually a review of the anthology) which changed the course of English literary history and incidentally exercised a lifelong influence on Leavis himself.

As a teacher Leavis tried to be gentler when crossed, but it still required courage, or foolhardiness, to venture a disagreement with him. To express the view, say, that Wordsworth's Immortality Ode was a great poem (not, after all, a self-evidently outlandish opinion) would elicit from Leavis a look of such long-suffering, such pain, such weary and hopeless resignation that one might have refrained from speaking up out of compassion for him even if one were not already terrorized into silence by the fear of convicting oneself of an incapacity for "independent critical judgment" (a quality Leavis actually believed he was helping his students to develop).

In thus poking fun at what was certainly a major failure of self-knowledge in Leavis, my intention is not to denigrate his work as a literary critic. A failure of self-knowledge is always (as Leavis himself demonstrated over and over again) a radical fault in a poet or a novelist, but it need not be seriously disabling in a critic. At any rate, unlike Leavis, I do not believe that his dogmatism was something to be ashamed of and denied. On the contrary, to me it seems one of his most valuable qualities and the essential ground of his greatness as a critic.

For in spite of everything that can be said against him, Leavis *was* a great critic. He was great, first of all, in his gifts of sensibility and intellect. Here again, I can testify from first-hand experience. Although as judged by his own criteria he was a very bad teacher, it was nevertheless an overwhelming experience to sit in one of his tiny classes (or "supervisions," as they are called at Cambridge) and listen to him day after day analyze poems or passages of English prose, explaining in the most concrete terms why these lines could only have been written in 1710 or why that stanza was superior to this and what extra-literary implications might be drawn from the difference. Not only did he seem to have read all the books there were to be read, but he had read them all—including the ones he despised—with a fullness of attention and an alertness of perception to which his students unhappily recognized they could attain only at rare moments in their own reading. Beyond this he seemed to know everything there was to know about the historical context of the poems and novels he discussed. And finally, all this digested and mastered knowledge, awesome in its sheer quantity, was in the living service of a powerful mind and a seriousness about literature the like of which was hard to match even in the early Fifties, when seriousness about literature was taken for granted in universities on both sides of the Atlantic.

To get some idea of what Leavis was like at these supervisions, a good place to go is to the section entitled "Judgment and Analysis" in one of his last books, *The Living Principle*

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(1975), where—comparing a series of poems by Wordsworth, Hardy, Lawrence, Eliot, and others—he treats us to a dazzling demonstration of what used to be called "practical criticism." But of course the same qualities that were so vividly present at his supervisions are abundantly evident throughout his writings. In fact, there was a much smaller gap between Leavis on paper and Leavis in the flesh than was the case with such other major contemporary critics as Lionel Trilling or Edmund Wilson.

Which brings up the much-vexed question of Leavis's prose style. Leavis has often been accused of writing badly, and it cannot be denied that his sentences tend toward the crabbed and thorny. As with Henry James's celebrated convolutions, this habit, always present in his prose, grew worse with age, so that by the time we get to his late works we regularly come upon passages like this: "The dangerousness of Andreski lies in his assuming that his discursive common-sense use of language *is* the use of language for thought—is, in the distinctive spirit that limits it, essentially, and more or less co-terminously, that; and inducing or conforming in most of his readers the blankness he reveals."

Thus Leavis at his worst. At his best, however, and for much of the time (even occasionally in the books of his old age), Leavis writes in a style that combines the spontaneity and flexibility of the spoken voice (*his* voice) with the sharpness and precision of careful composition. Summing up a long discussion of the relation between imagery and the emphasis on sound, as opposed to sense, in *Paradise Lost,* he once observed: ". . . Milton's preoccupation with 'music' precludes any strength in the kinds of imagery that depend on what may be called a realizing use of the body and action of the English language. . . ." This formulation is perhaps ungainly and its own "music" is harsh. But it certainly uses "the body and action of the English language" and in its own way exemplifies the virtue whose absence from Milton's verse it deplores. That is, instead of inducing "a generally relaxed state of mind" in us, which "brings nothing to any arresting force, but gives us a feeling of exalted significance, of energetic effortlessness, and of a buoyant ease of command," Leavis's charged, pointed, and evocative characterizations work to slow us down, to compel our careful attention, to make us think about what we are feeling.

This is why he has to be read very carefully, or not at all. Nor is there much point in reading his books (with the possible exception of *The Great Tradition* and a few essays here and there) unless one is prepared to consult the texts with which they deal. Leavis is addressing an "educated public" familiar with the poems and novels he writes about, not a casual lay audience. But what his prose thereby loses in accessibility, it gains in immediacy and allusive richness.

Leavis was great, then, in his gifts. But he was also great in what he achieved with those gifts. As a self-proclaimed disciple of T.S. Eliot, he undertook a systematic development of the "hints" (a favorite word of his) thrown out by Eliot's early critical essays and embodied concretely in Eliot's poetic practice. This involved a "revaluation" of the entire history of English literature in the light of the revolution effected by Eliot's poetry. "Sensibility alters from generation to generation in everybody, whether we will or no, but expression is only altered by a man of genius," Eliot had written, and Leavis (though he developed more and more reservations about Eliot as the years wore on) never deviated from the belief that Eliot *was* that man of genius for the generation of which they were both members. But Eliot had also said that such an alteration of expression must necessarily alter the way the present looks at the past. As a critic, Eliot himself had already sketched the outlines of the new shape of the past, most notably in elevating Donne and the other metaphysical poets of the seventeenth century above Milton and in downgrading the nineteenth-century Romantics (especially Shelley). With the additional help of such Eliotic concepts as the "dissociation of sensibility" and the "objective correlative," Leavis set out to fill in the details of this

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outline. But before he got very far he found himself running into conflict with Eliot both on specific judgments and in his general perspective, so that the new map he eventually drew of English literature, while owing its original inspiration to Eliot, turned out to be very much his own (and in many respects antithetical to Eliot's ideas).

This new map was largely charted in a series of three books: *New Bearings in English Poetry* (1932), which started with the late Victorians and ended with the early modernists (Yeats, Pound, and Eliot); *Revaluation* (1936), which flashed back to the seventeenth century and carried the account forward to the point where *New Bearings* had begun; and *The Great Tradition* (1948), which covered the English novel from the eighteenth century to the early twentieth. Having thus fixed the basic canon, Leavis later modified and added to it with two books on D.H. Lawrence (*D.H. Lawrence: Novelist* [1955] and *Thought, Words, and Creativity* [1976]) and *Dickens the Novelist* (written in collaboration with his wife Q.D. Leavis and published in 1970). Most of the pieces collected in *The Common Pursuit* (1952) and *Anna Karenina and Other Essays* (1955) are also best read and can in any case only be fully understood if they are seen as extended footnotes or appendices that enlarge or refine, or in some instances revise, the judgments according to which the place of a given writer in this canonical tradition is determined.

"Critics have found me narrow," Leavis once said, and then went on to complain of misrepresentation (as this most critical of all critics always did whenever he himself was criticized). Yet narrow he most assuredly was, and, as with the related charge of dogmatism, he would have been more honest if he had confessed to it and then claimed it as a virtue. For Leavis's narrowness was by no means the symptom of ignorance or of a limited ability to appreciate. It was, rather, inseparable from a willingness to commit himself clearly and without protective coloration to the critical judgments and the discriminations he was bent on establishing. The purpose these judgments and discriminations served was not primarily aesthetic (a word he hated). Leavis's aim, in fact, was almost the opposite of the spirit expressed in the famous concluding chapter of *The Renaissance,* in which Walter Pater speaks of cultivating the ability to discern "some tone on the hills or the sea . . . choicer than the rest." What, by contrast, Leavis was trying to do through the exercise of discrimination was "to ascertain the master-current in the literature of an epoch, and to distinguish this from all minor currents." These words come not from Leavis himself but from a critic no one accuses of narrowness, Matthew Arnold, who moreover called such an effort "the critic's highest function."

Working back, then, from his own "epoch," Leavis traced "the map or chart of English poetry as a whole" (his words this time) running from Shakespeare through Ben Jonson, Donne, Pope, Blake, Wordsworth, Keats, Hopkins, and finally T.S. Eliot. By the time we get to the nineteenth century in this account, however, and in spite of Wordsworth, Keats, and Hopkins, the master-current moves out of poetry and into the novel, whose greatest practitioners (the ones discussed in *The Great Tradition*) are—and Leavis says so explicitly—the true successors to Shakespeare. Indeed, Dickens—at first excluded from the line of great novelists because, although "a great genius . . . the genius was that of a great entertainer [who] had for the most part no profounder responsibility as a creative artist than this description suggests"[1]—later becomes for Leavis the "second Shakespeare."

Then, in the twentieth century, as the master-current of verse flows into T.S. Eliot, so the great novelistic tradition culminates in D.H. Lawrence, after which both lines dry up, leaving a literary landscape littered with the corpses of talented writers cut off for lack of proper nourishment, if not for lack of praise and influence. Commenting in this connection on W.H. Auden, the most cele-

1 The qualification refers to *Hard Times,* to which a special section of *The Great Tradition* is devoted.

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brated poet in the generation that followed Eliot, Leavis is at his most scathing:

> Mr. Auden's honesty there is no need to question; it may perhaps be said to manifest itself in the openness with which his poetry admits that it doesn't know how serious it supposes itself to be. . . . But it was not clear-sightedness that made him an irresistible influence. The "political awareness" and the "personal guilt" into which he "shamed a generation" were of a kind that it cost them very little to be shamed into. They asked for nothing better, and his poetry stilled any uncomfortable suspicion that there might be something better (if less comforting) to ask for. There it was, flatteringly modern and sophisticated, offering an intellectual and psychological profundity that didn't challenge them to any painful effort or discipline, and assuring them that in wearing a modish Leftishness they could hold up their heads in a guaranteed rightness. . . .

Leavis is speaking here of Auden's poetry of the Thirties, but the later Auden, who cast off the "modish Leftishness" of his youth and embraced religion, fares no better with Leavis. Indeed, the whole point for Leavis is that Auden's "remarkable talent" remained permanently arrested "at the stage of undergraduate 'brilliance.'"

As for the novelists who followed Lawrence, Leavis's attitude toward them all was summed up, give or take a detail or two, in what he said about C.P. Snow:

> . . . as a novelist he doesn't exist; he doesn't begin to exist. He can't be said to know what a novel is . . . he can't do any of the things the power to do which makes a novelist. He tells you what you are to take him as doing, but he can give you no more than the telling. . . . It is not merely that Snow can't make his characters live for us—that he lacks *that* creative power; the characters as he thinks of them are so impoverished in the interests they are supposed to have and to represent that even if they had been made to live, one would have asked of them, individually and in the lump: "What of life is there here, and what significance capable of engaging an educated mind *could* be conveyed through such representatives of humanity?"

In explaining why, on the one hand, a brilliant young poet like Auden should have failed to mature properly and, on the other, why an untalented novelist like Snow should have acquired so great a reputation, the answer in Leavis's scheme of things is simple: Bloomsbury. In Leavis's lexicon Bloomsbury stands for much more than the group of writers around Lytton Strachey, Virginia Woolf, Clive Bell, and the rest. It stands for "metropolitan literary society and the associated University milieux"—which is to say, weeklies like the *Observer* and the *Times Literary Supplement,* literary magazines like Cyril Connolly's *Horizon,* the BBC, and the English faculties of Oxford and Cambridge. This was the "establishment" against which Leavis stood in permanent rebellion (he even called himself an "outlaw"), and it was the prevalence of its "currency values" and the monopolistic power of its ideas and standards that accounted for Auden's failure to "become acquainted with serious criticism and the standards of maturity," first at the university and then when he entered "the larger literary world." And it was this same milieu, controlled by the same cliques and coteries, that, some twenty years later, pronounced Snow a major novelist and a great sage.

Although Leavis could speak very respectfully of a Bloomsbury writer like E.M. Forster, he nevertheless saw in the original circle, and still more in the literary world that grew out of it, a set of qualities that made serious criticism impossible: "Articulateness and unreality cultivated together; callowness disguised from itself in articulateness; conceit casing itself safely in a confirmed sense of high sophistication; the uncertainty as to whether one is serious or not taking itself for ironic poise: who has not at some time observed the process?"

The values associated with these qualities were even worse. Taking issue with a prominent Bloomsbury don's patronizing description of George Eliot as a Puritan who "admired truthfulness and chastity and industry

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and self-restraint, [and] disapproved of loose living and recklessness and deceit and self-indulgence," Leavis writes:

> I had better confess that I differ (apparently) from Lord David Cecil in sharing these beliefs, admirations, and disapprovals, so that the reader knows my bias at once. And they seem to me favorable to the production of great literature. I will add (exposing myself completely) that the enlightenment or aestheticism or sophistication that feels an amused superiority to them leads, in my view, to triviality and boredom, and that out of triviality comes evil.

But harsh as Leavis was toward any contemporary writer who won the approval of "Bloomsbury" (the very fact of being acclaimed by such a "system" was sufficiently damning by itself), he could be almost as harsh toward its favored writers of the past; and whenever its enthusiasms happened to coincide with his, he would be driven to demonstrate that the writer in question was being valued for all the wrong reasons. With this in view (and seeing Leavis's war with Bloomsbury as a continuation of the Roundhead-Cavalier split in English culture), Lionel Trilling once suggested that the reason Leavis was so rough on Congreve and Meredith was not that he really considered them so bad but rather that Bloomsbury considered them so good.

There was undoubtedly a certain truth in Trilling's speculation. But important as this factor may have been in the ferocity with which Leavis's negative judgments were expressed, it is also important to recognize that there was nothing gratuitous or arbitrary about those judgments themselves. The point was invariably to illuminate the positive alternatives and to keep them clearly and sharply in view. For if there was a master-current in poetry running from Shakespeare all the way to Eliot, there was another line running from Spenser through Milton, Dryden, Shelley, and Tennyson that represented not so much a minor current as a flow in the wrong direction. In the one tradition, the distinctive genius of English found its fullest realization by rooting itself in the spoken language and therefore also in the life being lived around it. In the other tradition there was a tendency to use Latin or Italian as a model; and with this linguistic habit went a correlative disposition to think of poetry as removed from ordinary life (the life expressed, precisely, in the spoken language) and as belonging to a "higher" realm or a world of dreams, cut off not only from daily life but from the concerns of an engaged and critical adult mind.

In the novel, too, of course, the "great tradition" was made up of writers with "a vital capacity for experience" and "a kind of reverent openness before life." But in the greatest novelists there was more to be found than the "creation of real characters . . . external abundance, and . . . a loosely generous provision of incident and scene." In the likes of Jane Austen, George Eliot, Henry James, and Joseph Conrad there was all this, but it was informed, controlled, and organized by "a marked moral intensity."

Neither in George Eliot nor in any other great novelist did such moral intensity manifest itself in didacticism; it was embodied and dramatized—or, as Leavis puts the point, "it justifies itself as art in the realized concreteness that speaks for itself and *enacts* its moral significance." Nor in the greatest novelists could a Flaubertian preoccupation with form be separated (as in Leavis's view it was in Flaubert himself) from "imaginative sympathy, moral discrimination and judgment of relative value." Thus Conrad, whose obsession with form sent him to school to the works of Flaubert, was the greater novelist "because of the greater range and depth of his interest in humanity and the greater intensity of his moral preoccupation."

Leavis's own moral intensity comes into play even when he writes about poetry. Perhaps the most striking example in all his writings, and the one that is most likely to startle a "sophisticated" reader today, is the essay on Shelley in *Revaluation*. There, after demonstrating through quotation and analysis that Shelley's poetry "offers the emotion in itself,

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unattached, in the void" in contrast to Wordsworth, in whose work the emotion always "seems to derive from what is presented" (Leavis leans heavily here, as so often he does, on Eliot's concept of the "objective correlative"), he remarks: "But criticism of Shelley has something more important to deal with than mere bad poetry; or, rather, there are badnesses inviting the criticism that involves moral judgment." He then goes on to show through an examination of several of Shelley's best-known works how "the wrong approach to emotion, the approach from the wrong side or end (so to speak)" leads to "viciousness and corruption" in the form of a self-regarding pathos, a luxurious self-pity, and a perverse "love of loathing."

Whether or not one finds such an analysis valid or persuasive—and I emphatically do—and whether or not one accepts Leavis's judgments in every particular—and I just as emphatically do not[2]—one should be able to recognize that the new "map or chart" he drew of English literature represented a great intellectual achievement. Leavis said of Dr. Johnson (with whom he has often and rightly been compared) that he spoke with perfect authority for the Augustan tradition of taste in which he was educated; one can say of Leavis that he spoke with perfect authority for the twentieth-century revolution in taste out of which his sensibility emerged.

For it was Leavis more than anyone else, certainly more than T.S. Eliot, the father of the revolution, who explored its implications. He did so, moreover, with the utmost critical rigor, by which I mean an unfailing responsibility not only to the relevant textual evidence but also to the requirements of consistency and coherence. Taste taken seriously has a logic of its own, and to this logic Leavis was relentlessly true. Here, and not in any arbitrary principle of exclusion, was the real source of his "narrowness." To think that Thackeray, say, was a truly great novelist was to commit oneself to certain standards and valuations that stood in the way of properly appreciating George Eliot or Henry James. Conversely, to understand how the genius of Keats developed into mature greatness was to become aware of why and how Shelley's genius failed to do so and why and how Tennyson represented a falling off. From the absence of such awarenesses as these came "the misdirection and waste of much talent" in writers like Auden and the wanton squandering by the present of the precious spiritual resources of the past.

But Leavis's narrowness flows from a deeper source as well. He is always called a Puritan, and so he was in his moral standards and even more markedly in his moral seriousness. But if we remind ourselves of the intimate connection between Puritanism and the Old Testament, we begin to see that what Leavis, the descendant of Huguenots, was trying to do in drawing a new map of English literature was the secular equivalent of what the rabbis of old did in fixing the Scriptural canon. Some of the many reputedly sacred books of ancient Israel, they decided, had actually been written under divine inspiration and therefore belonged in the Bible; others were holy but not divinely inspired and were placed among the apocryphal writings; still others were condemned as heretical. So with Leavis, for whom literature was surely a substitute for the Bible on which the Puritanism of his Protestant ancestors had been nourished, and for whom literary criticism accordingly became a substitute for devotional meditation and scriptural exegesis. (The presence of this element perhaps explains why Leavis's critical writings are so much more charged than the superficially similar but "secular" exegetical analyses produced by such American New Critics as Cleanth Brooks, Robert Penn Warren, and Allen Tate, with whom he was once imprecisely associated. It also explains why Leavis was once accused more precisely of

2 For what it may be worth, I think that among the novelists, Leavis overrates Conrad and Lawrence and underrates Fielding and Trollope; among the poets, I would say he does less than justice to Yeats, Byron, and Dryden, that he is too hard on Auden and too easy on Pound. Moreover, he has little of value to say, for good or ill, about any writer who has come along since the 1930s.

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believing that "literary criticism will save us.")

Leavis was, then, a great literary critic—great in his gifts and great in his achievement. But, to use one of his own favorite phrases, "discriminations are called for," and in his case they are called for by a set of amazingly simplistic ideas about contemporary civilization, ideas that C.P. Snow was right in characterizing as "Luddite." As Leavis denied that he was dogmatic or narrow, so he also denied that he was a Luddite. Yet reading through his works—from such early tracts as *Culture and Environment* (written in 1930 in collaboration with Denys Thompson) and *Education and the University* (1943) to the essays of his last years collected in *Lectures in America* (1969) and *Nor Shall My Sword* (1972)—one finds all the standard clichés about the malign effects of industrialism. Nor on the other side is there a good word anywhere in these writings for the improved standard of living brought about by the advance of technology; the very phrase "standard of living" is used only to deride the crass materialism of the people he called "technologico-Benthamites."

So blinded was Leavis by these clichés that even in the Sixties and Seventies, a time when the educated classes of the entire Western world were seized by a frenzy of hatred for technology and all its works, he imagined that contemporary culture was dominated by a Benthamite worship of technology; he even thought the student uprisings of the late Sixties (which he also scorned) were an outgrowth of the same ethos, whereas of course the youth culture of that period was as antagonistic to the ideal of material and technological progress as Leavis himself. In a hideously ironic sense, those young people of the counterculture were more *his* students than C.P. Snow's. In failing to see this, Leavis was guilty of another failure of self-knowledge.

Unlike his dogmatism and his narrowness, which contributed to his strength and his achievement as a literary critic, however, Leavis's Luddism had a damaging effect on his critical judgment. We see this most clearly in his wild misrepresentation of D.H. Lawrence. To Leavis, Lawrence was the greatest writer of our age, much greater than T.S. Eliot, his only serious rival; as such he elicited from Leavis an attitude so reverential that the prose of *D.H. Lawrence: Novelist* sometimes sounds more like prayer than criticism.

To be sure, Leavis, so famous for his harshness, was equally vehement in his enthusiasms; when he spoke of great literature he was invariably transported into a state resembling rapture. In the classroom, quoting a passage he admired, his face would take on an obviously devotional aspect: the eyes closed, the brow furrowed, and the head subtly inclined upward toward the heavens. On paper the same attitude took the form of an uninhibited outpouring of superlatives. For example, on Henry James:

> It is a measure of our sense of the greatness of Henry James's genius that discussion should tend to stress mainly what he failed to do with it. But what achievement in the art of fiction—fiction as a completely serious art addressed to the adult mind—can we point to in English as surpassing his?

Or on Conrad:

> But he was not only by far the greatest of the Edwardians; there is more to be said than that. . . . Conrad is among the very greatest novelists in the language—or any language.

On George Eliot (and Tolstoy):

> George Eliot, of course, is not as transcendently great as Tolstoy, but she *is* great, and great in the same way. The extraordinary reality of *Anna Karenina* (his supreme masterpiece, I think) comes of an intense moral interest in human nature that provides the light and courage for a profound psychological analysis. . . . Of George Eliot it can in turn be said that her best work has a Tolstoyan depth and reality.

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Finally, on Dickens:

> Our purpose is to enforce as unanswerably as possible the conviction that Dickens was one of the greatest of creative writers; that with the intelligence inherent in creative genius, he developed a fully conscious devotion to his art, becoming as a popular and fecund, but yet profound, serious and wonderfully resourceful practising novelist, a master of it. . . .

Reverential though such passages are, however, when we read Leavis on any writer other than Lawrence, and whether we agree or disagree with him, we recognize in the sure precision of his descriptions and in the illuminating characterizations of the work before him, the presence of a disinterested critical mind trying, in line with Matthew Arnold's prescription, "to see the object as in itself it really is." But we recognize no such thing in reading him on Lawrence. It is not that he is uncritical in the sense of accepting everything Lawrence ever wrote with equal enthusiasm. With the significant exception of a passage devoted to the ugliness of industrial England, he finds *Lady Chatterley's Lover* offensive, and he even takes issue with Lawrence's own high estimate of *The Plumed Serpent* as "my most important thing so far." But the tone in which he expresses his negative judgment of these books sounds oddly apologetic, especially set beside the firm decisive voice we hear when he diagnoses the weaknesses of such other canonical writers as James and Conrad.

Conversely, in discussing the novels he considers Lawrence's greatest, *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love,* Leavis becomes uncritical in the strict sense of taking intention for realization, conception for execution, assertion for dramatic enactment. Commenting, for example, on a passage in *The Rainbow* in which Lawrence puts his own thoughts into the mind of one of his characters, Leavis writes: "This, of course, is Lawrence himself—our awareness of that is overriding, without our being disabled from accepting it as Anna." Yet the whole point is that we *are* "disabled from accepting it as Anna," just as we are disabled from accepting any other character in these novels by Lawrence's overbearing refusal or inability to let them be. There is no life in them because they are nothing but counters in the polemical play of his ideas.

That Leavis should elevate these novels, which violate in the most fundamental way his own most important criteria, to a supreme position bespeaks an astonishing disorientation. It can, I believe, be traced to the same sin Lawrence himself commits in *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love* (though not in some of his shorter works). As Lawrence bullies his characters here entirely into the service of his own Luddite ideas about the contemporary world, so Leavis uses Lawrence in the service of the same ideas; and as Lawrence thereby sins against the impersonality without which the novelistic art is perverted into preaching, so Leavis sins against the disinterestedness in whose absence literary criticism becomes a species of covert ideologizing.

Only a few years after *D.H. Lawrence: Novelist* was published, the values for which Leavis so pre-eminently stood as a critic were subjected on both sides of the Atlantic to an assault of unprecedented force—and not from the "technologico-Benthamites" on whom his polemical guns were rigidly trained. Leavis in his obsessive way repeatedly cited the remark of a scientist he met sometime during the late Sixties or early Seventies who told him that computers could write poems. Obviously the reason he seized on this remark is that it seemed so perfect a crystallization of the "spiritual philistinism" bred by the technologico-Benthamite culture. What Leavis never understood, however, was that the naïve and ignorant attitude toward literature, and things of the spirit generally, expressed in the scientist's remark was harmless as compared with the attack on literature that was even then being mounted from within the literary culture itself. Thus, for example, the classical scholar Norman O. Brown, whose book on Freud, *Life Against Death,* had made him into one of the major gurus of the counterculture, later said:

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> We are in bondage to authority outside ourselves: most obviously . . . in bondage to the authority of books. . . . This bondage to books compels us not to see with our own eyes; compels us to see with the eyes of the dead, with dead eyes. . . . There is a hex on us, the specters in books, the authority of the past; and to exorcise those ghosts is the great work of magical self-liberation.

Several prominent literary critics, while not going quite as far as Brown, made their own contribution to the denigration of literature. Marshall McLuhan declared without notable regret that literature was obsolete and was being replaced by television; Richard Poirier wrote about the Beatles in terms that might have seemed excessive if applied to Shakespeare; Susan Sontag celebrated another singing group, the Supremes; and Leslie Fiedler stopped writing about literature altogether and devoted himself to the study of comic books. Evidently the slogan "against interpretation," which Sontag used as the title of her first collection of essays, applied only to literature and not to popular culture even at its lowest levels.

Though these developments achieved their most virulent form in America, they had their counterparts in England, too. Yet so obsessed was Leavis with "technologico-Benthamism" that he never even noticed them. If he had noticed them there is no doubt that he would have found them utterly repugnant, even evil. How could he not, given his fundamentally religious belief in the centrality of literature and of the need for an intelligent critical community? But if he had noticed, would he have recognized the influence of D.H. Lawrence (and also of his equally beloved Blake) in the spread of these anti-intellectual attitudes within the literary world? Would he have recognized in the counterculture the traces of some of his own most stubbornly held and persistently reiterated attitudes toward industrial society and all its works? Is it because these recognitions might have forced themselves into his consciousness if he had seen what was really going on around him in the last years of his life that he so resolutely refused to look?

Whatever the answers to such questions, it would of course be the height of absurdity to place too heavy an emphasis on this aspect of Leavis. Even granting that he himself was to some extent implicated in this poisonous assault on everything he held most dear, the antidote is nevertheless to be found in his own writings, with their incomparable case for the importance of literature and the wonderful demonstration they provide of a great critical mind at work.

As such, these writings have a special importance for us just now: a time when the spiritual resources of the literary past either lie buried in their library vaults or are mined by a new monopoly of "deconstructionist" critics for whom literary works have no "determinate" meaning and therefore no independent existence. Either way, the squandering and misuse of these indispensable and irreplaceable treasures have become far more wanton than even Leavis, with all his desperate forebodings, could have imagined possible.

As for criticism of contemporary writing, the situation just now in America is commensurately worse than it was in the England of Leavis's prime. Such once vital American centers of serious criticism as *Partisan Review* and *Kenyon Review* have long since given up, leaving the field almost entirely to our own local variant of Bloomsbury, headquartered in *The New York Review of Books* and *The New York Times Book Review* and devoted to the making and breaking of literary reputations in accordance with cliquish "currency-values" far more debased than the original Bloomsbury's ever were.

Because he so vividly embodies an alternative conception of the function of criticism—and despite his indiscriminately negative attitude toward new writing—Leavis's own words about George Eliot, that "for us in these days . . . she is a peculiarly fortifying and wholesome author, and a suggestive one," apply for us in *these* days with equal force to him.

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Enclosures: Barbara Pym

by Hortense Calisher

Everybody knows how cozy certain English novels can be. Like those foggy walks on the Downs which envelop the human figure in mildly mythic illumination and a gently courted sense of disaster, they almost always bring one home safe for tea. Often they belong to the genre of the series-novel, in which a continuing environs or reappearing characters can bring us that sense of familial enclosure which is one of the great precincts of the novel, and one we all crave. In effect, that is what any novel is, whether sliced near and parochial or projected abysmally far. Those enclosures which become great of themselves are inhabited by creatures who bear terrifying or encouraging resemblances to ourselves, no matter their station in life or ours. After that, these novels take their tone from how daringly their creator will violate the safety of the enclosure to show us the raw facts outside. Trollope's cynicism will do that. Jane Austen stays within—though so trippingly that her novels, if not strictly related as in the true genre, from a distance appear to be. Later, in France, Balzac's gargantuan appetite would attempt to make all human character his enclosure, and still later Proust, burrowing from within, would make his sequence all one book. Indeed, one measure of a novelist seems to be how we do or do not succumb to the ever-present temptation to serialize what we see.

There the English have often been specialists, brought to it by the continuities of class difference and the permanences of provincial life, in which during the later nineteenth century all the literate would seem to have been subscribers to Mudie's Library, lender par excellence to the long stretches of middle-class time. So the sought-for genre scene of life high or low could flourish on. If Mrs. Gaskell's Cheshire proved too modest you could exert your snobberies in Barchester, although, staying with either, you would ultimately find yourself moving on from *Cranford* to *Mary Barton* and working women in an industrial town, or from a cathedral close to the raunchy idlers of *The Way We Live Now* and on to Parliament with Phineas Finn.

Meanwhile, comfortingly localized place and domestic character would persist in the crannies of all the major novelists, either per se or enlarged, and often in strange mixture. Think of those marvelously *echt* curates and textbook-saint village women in Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley,* so curiously static, almost like period pieces, even as the novel is moving on into the world of the Luddite labor riots. It is George Eliot who will most have the courage for the world scene, yet it is her earlier evangelistically moral novels of village life which will provide the grounding for that most modern-sounding of Victorian novels, *Middlemarch.* Dickens will go farthest into the abyss of human misery, but with that strange alternation which will keep the great interlocking scenes of outer London separate from his lesser gallery of comic turns and fixed types, some of which may go back to

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those early Mystery plays in which accounts of English village life begin. While his women of course remain impossible. They are Mudie readers second-class and beyond, down to those kitchen-maid penny-dreadfuls they would have had to procure at the stationer's. I suspect even Little Dorrit of it. Even Little Nell.

All the while that other stream of the more stringently enclosed novel has persisted in one or another variation, as it always will. There would be Disraeli's friend Ada Leverson's sassy novels of titled manners, sexually explicit in all but language and antecedent of both Mitford and Wodehouse. In the early 1930s Angela Thirkell initiated her series of light novels of country-house life set in a borrowed Barsetshire with *High Rising,* succeeded by such titles as *Pomfret Towers, Before Lunch,* and *Cheerfulness Breaks In.* Intellectuals proclaimed themselves unable to read them, and it was said that her son Colin MacInnes, the distinguished author of *City of Spades* and other novels of West Indians in London, could not bear mention of them. Yet beginning in the 1920s there had been a series much tolerated, even cherished, as more by one of the intellectuals' own. These were the "Lucia" novels of E.F. Benson, son of the Archbishop of Canterbury and biographer of, among others, Edward VII. Recently I reread them. They recount the infuriating progress and satisfying defeats of an impossibly arrogant and enchantingly self-willed country-town social arbiter as surrounded by the not always compliant gossip-on-the-green antics of her coterie, characters farcical enough in themselves. One sinks guiltily in their coy charms, grudging each book's end, grateful for its encore, and meanwhile swaddled away from one's own bothers by this dottily appealing contredanse, for it's a round-the-clock read in which continuity is the real sugarplum. Feydeau bouts of time-off fun for the brainy, cloyingly too delicious by far, they are ridiculous *in toto,* savorable in all their parts, from which one exits at last with a vast "pouf." Only later does one notice how the surface moralities of a decade have been proffered us in ironic bouquet.

It is such books, if not these precisely then the whole secondary stream of them—and not the divine Jane, as is the current analogy—that are the antecedents of Barbara Pym. Perhaps in this lies the reason why, after issuing six of her books during the 1950s, her publisher rejected her next, bringing on a silence lasting until 1977, when with *Quartet in Autumn* her reputation was revived. She died in 1980. I recall encountering her at the Booker Awards dinner in 1977. If she knew she was dying she may have had thoughts on those belated tributes which are so often the lot of the artist crippled or moribund, for that same evening a prize to Paul Scott for his *Raj Quartet* was accepted by his daughter, since he was then on his deathbed. We often do the same, only a little later, for our suicides. Thereafter one must take care to assess the work, not the discovering fans. It is possible to love Jane and still flee the Jane-ites. In the case of Pym I find myself somewhere between.

One must of course never trust English life not still to contain those quiet corners which once symbolized it. The heroine of *Excellent Women* (1952), an ecclesiastical spinster who clocks her life by the Lent Service at St. Ermin's or by a "I was formally introduced to Mrs. Gray at the jumble sale," decides that "love is a terrible thing" and "not quite my cup of tea." Tea is the strongest drink—or metaphor—in all of Pym, and the coda of all crises. We also meet Everard Bone, anthropologist yet passionate convert. They are in a shabby corner of London the wrong side of Victoria, meeting at church, Learned Society do's, antique shops, and front doors, some thirty years ago. Passing there now one might see punks of both sexes packing a car just as possibly for a picnic as for an orgy, though their hair may be waxed in magenta porcupine quills. Yet only last month, in the cathedral town of St. Alban's, my hostess shyly showed me some vignettes of local life she had been writing, and very well too, for the church magazine, these and its other announcements quite appropriate to the Pym paperback I had read en route. Or as the punks might have been, if Pym had got

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around to them, for it is her disarming habit to modulate to the contemporary surface while she keeps her own vantage.

In *Less than Angels* (1958) we are still in a covey of anthropologists—so often Pym's rather transparent cover for life-study—who here put Floradora on the player-piano and ask each other, "I hope you eat the meat of brownfleshed birds" (duckling in this case, venison having been served the day before). Catherine, the young writer, wears "the fashions of the day" when "women of thirty could dress like girls of twenty, their hair apparently cut with nail-scissors." What one eats, drinks, wears—and what one quotes from a collectively known poetry index—will be important to all these novels, linked as they are by recurring preoccupations as much as by characters, and by the floating minutiae of daily living never treated as trivia, to which these mild psyches are wittily but exhaustively attached. Of Paris cafés, where, it is said, "if you sat long enough everybody you had ever known or loved would pass by," Catherine thinks: "Surely it couldn't be quite *everyone,* that would be far too emotionally exhausting." Pym is fondest of the heroine of limited appreciations, and for our pleasure is not above patronizing them, as with Wilmet, the sub-adulterous young matron in *A Glass of Blessings* (1958): "We were to learn the subjunctive and I found myself wondering whether I could take so kindly to the Portuguese now that I realized how often they used it." There is often some such slippage of irony between the character's own irony and what the author herself cannot contain, and it is then that one wishes for some heavier sword to poke through this fine arras of wit always interposed. Or perhaps it is that, in novels so based on the perfect dig and—one must say it—on ticking people off, the steady small rain of apperception finally palls. Still one is grateful for the glass always offered, of intelligent amusement from an ever-observant mind which only boundaries appear to excite.

The sexual is merely grazed even when it is the subject. Middle-aged women fall in love with homosexuals, or, like Leonora, the narcissist of *The Sweet Dove Died* (1978), with young men like James, who feels after making love with a younger woman that "while he was not particularly anxious to repeat the experience he liked to think that he could if he wanted to." Emma of Pym's last novel, *A Few Green Leaves* (1980)—the name-parallel with Austen's *Emma* going not unmentioned—thinks of a man with whom she had once had a brief love affair: "To say that he had been her lover was altogether too grand, for there had not been that much love about it, no more than proximity and a mild affection." When he comes to sleep occasionally at her cottage, "Sometimes he would have to be content with her company only, her conversation, and whatever else he might be prepared to ask and she to give." So do Pym readers have to be, the author not saying what that "else" is, or indeed what is meant by "company." One can end up feeling that not all the reticence in these books comes from art.

Pym enjoys people who have not quite had passion. As the gentle insights come on, poking fun more wellbred than the wellbred, it's like having a sly friend, gifted at protracted gossip and with a special eye for those whose timid energies have almost been expunged. You may feel superior to her people for the circumscription of their lives, from which so much is absent, in the main children, often marriage, or a love not arrived at from languid motives or over-spiritual ones. Yet, as with any world watched in wax and wane, people take on dignity with their own finiteness.

In Pym's last book, Emma's friend Ianthe, now in love with a "gay" (the word still being made much of), was once the young librarian of *An Unsuitable Attachment,* the book whose rejection had silenced its author. Destiny, or applied psychology, has rounded out Ianthe —always the serial temptation. Looking back, one might see how that book's deceptively limp cat-lovers and people-fanciers might have appeared during the rise of the Beatles, the welfare state, and the Labour

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Party, and the concomitant decline of the Kensington drawl on the BBC. An audience was changing. People were wanting to read about new-class energies. Partisanship verging on propaganda was required of a writer's stance on the people written about, and Pym's perfectly adjusted harmonics could leave one in doubt. Did she love her characters too much, or not very? Kinship is not part of her spectrum—except to ordinary events, the squashed ones. The kind of hurt which could emanate from Stevie Smith, in her work as in her presence, that winning empathy of the minor for the minor, evades Pym. She is rather a finely ticking ear, with a taste for those who are squelched.

Further, the female audience for the serious novel was not quite as it had been. George Eliot's audience, and that of even later writers, had not been so sexually divided; non-literary men of that era read novels without qualm. The kitchen-maiders would be ever with us, Tauchnitz to Harlequin. Now there was a new middle group. Pym is very good on the comfort women take in each other, but there was Lessing now. There would also be those novels of popular or sociological family concerns which raised the intelligence ante perhaps, yet gave the feminine reader a workout in her own domestic world which refreshed exactly as exercise does in a salon.

Meanwhile, Drabble would soon be re-identifying the university couple and the in-crowd of liberal opinion. Angus Wilson's homosexuals were coming in from an altogether sharper world. Above all the language had changed, violently. While the language of a class society is always referential, and indeed one of England's prides, the references had changed; once again the vowels had bent. Pym's cadence could sound coy. Most of all, the enclosures of the serial novel itself had shifted. Joyce Cary had his Irish eye on the netherworld of art, C.P. Snow was issuing his scoops on the politics of ambition, and Anthony Powell's *Music of Time* was making its annual serio-comic grumble of disquiet over all the losses. The world of the *conversazione,* which Pym's essentially is, was a beleaguered world, even where it existed. Such a reality was in some disgrace.

Equally one can see why the time for its resurrection has come. As with some of the "period" television shows on both sides of the Atlantic, Pym's gently acerb serial makes it intellectually possible to escape into a postwar period many in England can remember and some over here can be charmed by, while the pleasures of participatory fandom—remember Tolkien?—can be as stylish as transatlantic chess. Yet novels like these have a residue, persuading us that our own lives, where quiet, are not valueless, especially when wit, like lemon to tea, can be added. Even the fan-dom which a run-on novel so often evokes is a kind of piety toward the novel form. Yet when the comparisons run wild, then one does have to remark that the size of the target inevitably defines the stature of the satirist. In Pym's work itself there is no indication that we are to take its devotion to the smallish as aspersion on the real extravagance.

The enclosed novel doesn't have to take place in the drawing room. It can be a "No Exit" of metaphor. Or it can exist, as the Ivy Compton-Burnett novels did, on superficiality, in one of the more elegant drawing rooms of hell. What one asks of the great enclosures (and gets) is an assurance that the sequestration is natural within the life of the times, and within human nature as well. In Austen one receives both. One has no wish to see her travel abroad. The measure of what we get from her is marked by a certain relief that she never did. One is brought into all the parlors of the world. Yet in that modern apostrophe to dailiness, Tanizaki's *The Makioka Sisters,* one is never allowed to forget the implied world outside. Perhaps that points to why, for us now, the enduringly poignant enclosures are those which are broached, as when, in the parlor exchanges of Prince Myshkin, the poorfolk alleyways suddenly intrude. Or when, embosomed in the Cheerybles, we remember the vast, interlocking streets of the miserable child. When tea will not do, when safety is not intended, somehow that is where we best find it.

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Music

American opera: honors and performances

by Samuel Lipman

In American music, honors are always more attractive than performances. Honors mean piety, publicity, and parties; performances mean hard decisions about repertory, personnel, box office, rehearsals, and concerts —and then (God rest our busy souls) an audience actually has to be assembled to listen to the music. Indeed, so much is this the case across the contemporary serious music scene that a rule can be drawn from all the evidence: composers are more honored in the speech than they are in the hearing.

Something of the truth of this rule can be gathered from events of the last New York musical season. Two of our most honored composers, Virgil Thomson and Roger Sessions, turned eighty-five during this period. Both were given the usual rounds of compliments, celebrations, and media coverage proper to their age and eminence. Sessions was awarded a Pulitzer Prize for his Concerto for Orchestra. This strong new work, commissioned by the Boston Symphony Orchestra for its hundredth anniversary, although performed in Boston, will not receive its New York premiere until next season. Thomson was accorded special literary coverage, doubtless because of his own extensive critical writings; the publication of these writings in a new edition was the occasion for particular praise.

More interesting than all the verbiage, however, was the treatment accorded a much talked-about work of each composer during the celebratory season just past. In the case of Virgil Thomson, the work in question was undoubtedly his greatest achievement, the opera *Four Saints in Three Acts* (1927-28), written to a libretto by Gertrude Stein at her nonsense best. For Roger Sessions, New York attention was focused on his most ambitious creation, the opera *Montezuma* (1941-1963), written to a libretto by Thomas Mann's son-in-law, G.A. Borgese; it was performed first in Berlin in the mid-1960s and then, more than a decade later, in Boston under the direction of Sarah Caldwell. The performance of *Four Saints* was the most ambitious in New York since it was done at the ill-fated Mini-Met in 1973. *Montezuma* was receiving its New York premiere.

The surroundings for the performance of Thomson's *Four Saints* were not terribly grand. To begin with, the work was not staged in an opera house but performed in a concert version in Carnegie Hall—soloists at the front of the stage, orchestra in the middle, and chorus at the back. Thus missing was all suggestion of the atmosphere of the Florine Stettheimer settings, all gaudy in hot colors and cellophane, which were so integral to the success and the lasting influence of the original 1934 Broadway production (which ran, surprising as it may seem today, for six weeks in commercial theaters). Missing too, of course, was all idea of stage movement and acting.

Still, half a loaf—especially in American opera—is better than none, and what was absent could easily have been excused if what

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was present had been outstanding or even adequate to the task. What was present was the music, and it was the weakness of the musical performance which made this rendering of *Four Saints* yet another example of the dreary record of the production of major American opera.

As almost always when things go wrong in musical performance, the responsibility lay with the direction. The director of this performance was the conductor Joel Thome. Well known as a contemporary music specialist (and widely admired for his skill in putting together funding for groups and projects), Thome seemed more personally affable than effective as a leader. He failed to bring either rhythmic vibrancy or ensemble discipline to Thomson's collection of hymn tunes and plain cadences. The matter can be simply put: with music where lightness of touch is all, Thome was both over-cautious and routine.

One attempt was made, however, to capture the ambience of the original performance. Thome employed an all-black vocal cast, as had Thomson and the opera's original director, John Houseman—who made a sentimental birthday tribute to Thomson from the stage of Carnegie Hall just before the music began—nearly fifty years before. In his memoirs Thomson describes his reasons for the choice: it was not simply a matter of how well the black artists he was considering would sing the music and appear on stage, but also of how carefully they would speak and sing Gertrude Stein's English. This attention to words seemed hardly present in the Carnegie Hall performance, except in the clear and projected diction of soprano Betty Allen. But Allen these days has little real voice left, and Clamma Dale and Gwendolyn Bradley in their parts were content to sing with beautiful tone; they conspicuously failed to articulate the all-important words. The other singers were undistinguished, and the chorus (so important to the work's realization), sounding understrength and underled, lacked both force and presence.[1]

Something too must be said about the audience for this ceremonial occasion. The house was full of well-known people from the Thirties, Forties, and Fifties in American art, and in particular from the ranks of those who came back from France bringing, as Thomson did, French modernism in its most pleasant and approachable modes to our Puritan shores. To see this audience once more assembled was to be put in mind of Proust's description (in *Le temps retrouvé*) of the once vital notables at the reception of the Princesse de Guermantes, upon all of whom the frost of winter had descended. In this case, one had expected them to look old; one had not expected to find them seeming so irreplaceable.

To move from Thomson's *Four Saints* to Roger Sessions's *Montezuma,* presented last February by the talented students of the Juilliard American Opera Center, is to leave the pleasing milieu of Parisian modernism for the very center of German-influenced musical seriousness. For something like a half-century Sessions has been respected by his colleagues for both the high qualities of his music and the steadfastness of his artistic purpose. Nine symphonies, four solo concertos, three piano sonatas, two string quartets, a string quintet, a profound choral setting of Whitman's *When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd*—leading all these works is *Montezuma.*

The opera's plot is based on Bernal Diaz's classic account, founded on personal experience, of the encounter between the Spanish *conquistadores* and the Aztecs. Diaz himself was sympathetic to Montezuma and his

1 All these musical strictures apply with equal force to the just released Nonesuch recording made shortly following the performance discussed above and using the same forces. Not only do these new discs seem lacking when judged by themselves; they are also inferior artistically to the composer's own 1947 recording (RCA LCT 1139) of an abridged version of the opera. Altonell Hines's singing of the role of the Commère (sung in Carnegie Hall and on the recording by Betty Allen) is a striking lesson in clarity of diction, beauty of speech, and natural vocalism. The choral singing too is magnificent, and the recording's sound stands up surprisingly well. This disc deserves immediate re-issue.

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allies; Borgese's florid libretto, true to the mood of the period when it was written—around the Second World War—is heavy with antifascist significance. It requires little effort to apply the plot's ideological gravamen to contemporary ideas of colonialism and national liberation.

Although the story line of *Montezuma* now seems quaintly fashionable, the music is yet another example of Sessions's uncompromising demands on performers and listeners alike. The style of the music, as is common with Sessions, derives from Schoenbergian serialism. From the orchestra Sessions demands both security in intonation and the ability to articulate awkward intervals with musical conviction. The singers face similar musical difficulties—complicated intonation and uncomfortable successions of notes—together with another problem, common to many large-scale contemporary opera productions: that of having to soar out over a huge orchestra which competes with, rather than supports, their efforts.

And once again, as is true of all concerted music of the modern tradition, the greatest demands are those placed on the conductor. On the most basic level, it is often difficult in this kind of music for the conductor to beat time: the crutches that most conductors lean on to keep them going—the regularities of harmony, rhythm, and tempo—are only rarely present. To make matters worse, beating time, necessary though it is to just getting through a performance, is hardly enough. Put in the simplest terms, the conductor's task is simultaneously to feel the music—each note of it—and control everything, and the music of our century makes that task especially difficult.

Here, once again, was where the performance of *Montezuma* failed in the most basic sense. The problem was not that it was a school performance; most of the students involved, singers and players alike, are professionals already, and the scenic demands of the work were satisfied well enough. The shortcomings were musical, and their cause was the conductor, Frederik Prausnitz. Though Prausnitz is vastly experienced in music of this kind (and said to have been the composer's personal choice), in this performance his beat was at once mechanical and unclear, he showed no feeling for the music's melodic outline, and he failed to control balances in his enormous orchestra of one hundred and thirty-five players. The singers were swamped, the percussionists ran amok, and the music was all too often made to seem merely arbitrary.

And yet, *mirabile dictu,* the piece survived: many stretches of beauty came through and many moments of dramatic force as well. Indeed, the end of the second act, involving the humiliation of Montezuma by Cortez, was shattering both as theater and as music—that is to say, as opera.

Despite the flaws of the performance, the Juilliard School deserves both credit and the critic's gratitude for its courage and intelligence in producing this difficult work. It is especially important to stress our debt to Juilliard in this matter because of the universal chorus of criticism with which the piece was received in the New York press. One important review, for example, praising the performance while blaming the music, was titled "Montezuma's Revenge."

As with the performance of *Four Saints,* a comment on the audience is in order. I attended the last of the opera's three performances, and the Juilliard Theater was full of highly esteemed and decorative characters from the worlds of opera presentation and music publishing. From this audience—at least from the musically trained part of it—one might have expected some comprehension of what Sessions had attempted. Instead, a palpable air of hostility and irritation pervaded the house. Numerous snide comments about the music circulated in the corridors during the intermissions; almost universally the detractors lamented the absence of a richly melodic music. As they described what they wanted, I realized that in fact their hearts' desire had already been realized. What they evidently wanted was Puccini. It is to this pass that musical sophistication—even among professionals—now appears to have come.

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What went wrong? Why were these opportunities to pay real, rather than tinsel, tributes to two important American composers lost, and lost in the very capital of American musical life? Clearly a good part of the blame must be laid at the hands of the musical directors of each enterprise. Had they been more gifted, the performances would have been vastly better and the tributes would have counted.

But beyond personalities—beyond the abilities of individuals—there is a further lesson to be learned here. The performance of *Four Saints* was not given under the institutional auspices appropriate to its status as a classic American opera. *Montezuma* was not presented with the richness of dramatic effect and the depth of musical personnel which its position in our musical achievement deserves. A proper New York City Opera, dedicated to our national culture, working in a house suited to the character of the works it presents and the voices it employs, under a management dedicated to something other than personal publicity and fundraising, could have done *Four Saints* in an exemplary manner. A proper Metropolitan Opera, seeing its duty as something more than mere survival through Verdi and Puccini, could have lavished its unparalleled resources of money and experience on the difficult task of producing *Montezuma*.

But they didn't, and, given the present path of quasi-public culture in this country, there is no sign that they will do so any time soon. So, in the meantime, we have parties and prizes, studies and panels, speeches and articles, compliments and celebrations.

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Architecture

The new museum

by William H. Jordy

To celebrate its own decision to enlarge its existing building with an addition by Michael Graves, the Whitney Museum of Art is currently featuring seven designs for new museum buildings or for enlargements of other American museums, all either in the design stage or presently underway.[1] Only a small portion of the many museum projects on the drawing boards today, they represent merely the latest stage in an extraordinary expansion of art museum facilities around the world since 1960.

In fact, the most creative public-building type during the past quarter of a century has been the art museum. It has not been the governmental building or the theater, although some outstanding examples of these will come to mind; nor has it been the public memorial or transportation terminal, which the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries made much of. Although civic centers and convention centers have become the latest architectural measure of municipal respectability and enterprise, even less can be said of them; we have yet to see anything better than C.F. Murphy Associates' McCormick Center in Chicago of the mid-1960s (although I.M. Pei's current design for New York's convention center may set a new standard for the type).

Why is it that the art museum, of all public buildings, seems now to be the most creative building type? The phenomenon has something to do with the increasing visual emphasis of twentieth-century culture—from printed illustrations and photographs to movies, slides, television, computer graphics, and even video games; it reflects as well the diversity with which works of art manifest themselves in museums today. More important, though, it results from the ways in which museums have gone out to embrace a wider public ever since the Museum of Modern Art located itself in the heart of Manhattan in the Thirties, with a revolving door on the street and an enlarged view of what a museum devoted to modern art should encompass.

Indeed, the crowds at the Museum of Modern Art came to be so large that Philip Johnson, in his 1964 expansion of the Museum, was forced to make what was then considered to be lavish provision for an entrance hall just to get them in the door. Now Cesar Pelli is radically enlarging this entrance area, and backing it with a vast circulation hall that culminates in a pleated greenhouse for escalators looking out on the sculpture garden. The substantial ground-floor gallery spaces of the Johnson addition (as well as some on the second floor) will be usurped by a bookstore, a gift shop, and two restaurants, all vastly larger and more conspicuously located than their predecessors. It all puts one in mind of certain building arcades, like that at the base of New York's

1 "New American Art Museums," organized by Helen Searing. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (June 24 through October 10).

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Citicorp building, or of shopping marts like Quincy Market, South Street Seaport, Harbor Place, and Ghirardelli Square. Although more populist in character than high-style museums, these places offer comparable commercial attractions.

The start of it all may have been the big, triple-vaulted entrance hall at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which took over from the old Grand Central Terminal the role of being New York's main gatherer and disperser of crowds. Like the Terminal, the Met centered its information booth in the concourse, and it lined the concourse with shops and the provision for luggage (the Met's facility was far more efficient, by the way).

To these concourse aspects of museum design, I.M. Pei added others. His enlargements of the National Gallery in Washington and the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston included restaurants and an overhead greenhouse effect. Visible escalation from level to level, with balconies and bridging, served to swell the animation, different in kind from the Guggenheim Museum's but seeking a comparable effect. Exhibition galleries appeared in Pei's additions, but in corners, off to one side of the spectacle. Devoted to temporary shows—the *dernier cri* of posters and pennants—they magnified the hubbub.

Pei's additions were specifically called into being in order to meet a need for crowd management, service, and titillation which could no longer be fitted to the older buildings. Spectacularly perceived as "buildings" in their own right, they made virtual adjuncts of what they were meant to enlarge. Pelli's concourses for MOMA provide the public services offered in Pei's, and they have the advantage of being connected with the theater downstairs and Johnson's famous sculpture garden in back.

If the manner in which the museums have expanded to meet a larger public accounts in part for the pre-eminence of the art museum as the liveliest type of public building today, are there other reasons, more specifically architectural? Edward Larrabee Barnes' remarks on his design for the new Dallas Museum of Fine Arts in the Whitney show suggest an answer: "What kind of architecture supports art rather than competes with it? Obviously highly sculptural or overbearing architecture can upstage the art on display. At the same time, anonymous loft space with no relief of any kind can be monotonous." Museums call for precisely the kind of reticence in the treatment of space (as theaters, for example, do not) which is especially congenial to the range of modern architecture. Moreover, the endemic concerns of modern architecture make art museums an especially attractive monumental type. Open, flexible spaces in which people can freely move and luminous environments have been central concerns of modern architecture and architectural theory. So art museums are a "natural" for modern architecture, especially when, as now, the bare-bones functionalism of its past aspires to be more historical and monumental.

As Helen Searing, the curator of the Whitney exhibition, observes in her fine catalogue essay, the art museum we know today, which appears in diverse manifestations in the Whitney show, begins to take form in three especially influential designs, all occurring around 1940. Previously, as her survey of the history of museums shows, the typical museum had been a glorified strongbox. The paradigm evolved during the first decades of the nineteenth century in such classic precedents as Leo von Klenze's Glyptothek in Munich (1816-30) and Karl Friedrich Schinkel's Altes Museum in Berlin (1823-30), and in the theoretical projects which J.-N.-L. Durand published in his *Précis des leçons d'architecture* (1802-05). Ideally, the box contained a sequence of room-like galleries arranged in a hollow rectangle, preferably two stories high, with a monumental space (often a rotunda) at the center of the hollow dividing it into two courts. And the core space rose the full height of the building, sometimes penetrating the roof with a dome or raised skylight. It served as an interior response to the portico outside, as a central point of spatial reference, and as an alternate route to the rectangular circuit of the gal-

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leries. The strongbox paradigm of museum design—sometimes elaborated with added courts and wings—held sway from the beginning of the nineteenth century until (in the United States at least) John Russell Pope's National Gallery opened in Washington in 1941.

Meanwhile, the modernist museum had already begun to take form, not as a paradigm, but as a cluster of possibilities. The three designs especially noted by Searing are Philip Goodwin and Edward Durell Stone's Museum of Modern Art, completed in 1939; Mies van der Rohe's project for a "Museum for a Small City" of 1942, which he eventually realized in two stages in Houston and most definitively in his Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin (1962-68); and Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim Museum, projected in 1942 and completed, after much delay, in 1959. Three museums, they emphasized three different kinds of space for showing art: warehouse space, continuous spreading space (inflected only by the objects it contains), and engulfing, environmental space.

To these influential prototypes for the spatial treatment of today's museums I would add three more (most of them mentioned by Searing, but not as prototypes for current museum design). Louis Kahn's Kimbell Museum in Fort Worth and his Yale Center for British Art (1966-72 and 1969-77) make space incrementally by the insistent repetition of identical geometric units that recall the classical gallery as a "room" without necessarily boxing the space by walls. James Stirling's addition to the Wallraf-Richartz Museum in Cologne (1974) and his building for the Northrhine-Westphalia Art Collection (1974), part of the redesign of the Grabbeplatz in Düsseldorf, fragment the traditional compactness of the strongbox by pulling apart the principal functions of the museum and making loosely connected, semi-independent structures. Stirling thereby creates an intense figure-ground play between the building shards and the residue of irregularly shaped courts. Finally, the Roche-Dinkeloo greenhousing of the perimeter of the Metropolitan (1961-81) offers an example of what Henry-Russell Hitchcock called in another context agglutinated space. Moving from one new wing of the Met to another (from, say, the American Wing to the Michael Rockefeller Wing for Primitive Art) is like moving from one new museum to another, which makes the Met today a dense cluster of museums bonded together by the nuclear concourse.

The display at the Whitney offers several examples of these museum types. Thus, Barnes' Dallas Museum of Fine Arts emphasizes the agglutinated space. A processional corridor running from one end of the museum to the other is lined on either side by rectangular "buildings" of varied size, each clearly differentiated from the others. Barnes himself has compared them to stores along a street, any one of which can be shut off from the others at will. Moreover, each of the three major galleries is given its own spatial identity. One is very formal, with four square galleries in the corners creating a cross-shaped space at the center with vaulting; one has floating panels in a continuous space at the center in the manner of Mies van der Rohe; one has strongly angled geometrical shapes within it, the dominant shape so assertively and compactly presented as to suggest an object in itself. Different kinds of outdoor garden and sculpture courts are interspersed throughout. The museum is a series of abruptly changing environments suggesting old period rooms, except that each of its galleries is huge, a mini-building in scale, like the exposition halls at the Met. Its treatment of space is less florid, however, and its quiet slotting and courting of natural light helps to induce the repose required for contemplation.

Bruce Goff's "Shin'enKan" Museum for the exclusive showing of a wealthy oil man's collection of Japanese tokonoma scroll paintings (with no location specified as yet) recalls Wright's Guggenheim. (Even more idiosyncratic than Wright in his designs, Goff independently anticipated the fantasy environmental space of this design in an early house.) On the ground floor of the museum compartmented walls for showing the scrolls, each

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with its own cubicle, are curved somewhat like the Guggenheim's but in three separate segments arranged in a pinwheel fashion, with a water moat as a symbolic "river" running in front of each wall. To view the tokonoma, spectators stand on three "islands" before each of the three walls. A ramp rising and circling the space (triangular, but with bowed walls and rounded corners) provides another pinwheel for display and three more spectator islands floating in space. It is all topped by a curved, vaguely pagoda-like roof supported by cables from masts. The river flows out of the museum, through a series of stepped and walled gardens. Words cannot do justice to such an exceptional design. But they can suggest the fascination in some current projects with the idea of all-encompassing space, and indicate a delayed rediscovery of what had once promised to be unique to Wright. Undoubtedly the big concourse museum spaces in New York, Washington, and Boston have given the Guggenheim fresh relevance.

In Richard Meier's design for the High Museum in Atlanta, the entire exhibition area is organized around an open, top-lighted center core with curved ramps—confessedly derived from the Guggenheim, although rising with zigzag changes of direction reminiscent of the ramps in Le Corbusier's Savoye villa. Instead of displaying works of art, however, the ramps serve as the means of reaching a stack of galleries in four or five levels, with balconies and openings cut through walls so that one is constantly made aware of the luminous core and offered glimpses of works of art (as in the Guggenheim) from all sorts of vantage points. One is made aware, too, of the movement of people on these ramps and levels; the people in the drawings at the Whitney are depicted in *Gone With the Wind* costume, as though to underscore how fancy dress in such varied and exhilarating space could easily compete for interest with the works of art.

Meier's museum hybridizes the all-encompassing core space of the Guggenheim and the exploded and fragmented space of Stirling's museums in Cologne and Düsseldorf. A curved wedge shape (like a quarter piece of cake) spews a free-form auditorium and administration mini-building, between which a long, outdoor ramp, overarched by a mock stage-set portico, leads to an entrance porch.

Similarly, Charles Moore, working with the Moore Grover Harper firm, angles one range of galleries over another for the Hood Museum at Dartmouth College in order to link an existing cluster of college buildings with a jagged and curved collage of pitched roofs and angled and curved courts. The same fragmented approach to space also ties new construction into existing buildings in Henry Cobb's design for I.M. Pei's Portland (Maine) Museum of Art. Here, an existing neoclassical strongbox with a couple of adjacent period houses are augmented by the new Charles Shipman Payson Building in a stepped massing. Kahn's incremental mode of making and marking space by "gallery" units is the means of realizing the angular addition. One cube of space one story high, as the connector to the existing building, rises and expands to two cubes in height and width in the next range, to three cubes, to four. It is Kahn perhaps crossed by Sol LeWitt. The sequence is fronted by a four-story facade which faces away from the old frontage. On the facade, out-sized circular elements are played off against the rectangular openings of an arcade, again very much in the Kahn manner.

What does one make of this sampling of possibilities, apart from their diversity and the evident creative ferment in museum design today? Surely the gallery is no longer the decorated, room-sized container it once was, with its cornices, wainscoting, and pilasters acting as the architectural frame to the frame (or pedestal) of the museum's works of art. This is clear even where the gallery units are as firmly imprinted as they are in the Portland Museum. The art object is immersed in and becomes part of a more dynamic and insistent environment, to be experienced less as a self-contained object of contemplation and more as an incident in the overall spectacle.

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The new wings at the Met offer a useful example of this. In their vastness and glassiness, they almost appear to be exposition sheds. In the Rockefeller Wing the spectacular displays of primitive art stretch out in all directions, "as far as the eye can see." As in an exposition, one finds it difficult to focus, but one feels compelled to move on, "to take it all in"; one reaches some distant highlight only to be lured off to another. Under the mammoth glazing for the American painting galleries, the period rooms huddle like booths in a commercial fair.

Writing of his museum for Atlanta, Meier is explicit about the sort of spectacle that generally characterizes the kind of environment which today's museum favors in various ways and to varying degrees. Here "galleries are organized to offer multiple vistas and cross-references. . . . Exhibition spaces are so arranged that one can look across the atrium from one gallery to another; it is therefore possible to see a work of art within a gallery close up, or, coming around on the ramp, to see it again from a different perspective. Thus in addition to the changing perspectives of objects, visitors have a full panorama of internal circulation and views of the atrium and outdoors." It is an environment in which high-stimulus spatial effects are combined with exceptionally inventive lighting systems, employing for the most part a mix of artificial and natural illumination and thereby steering a middle course between MOMA's artificially lit warehouse space and the Met's glass roofs.

The models and drawings in the Whitney exhibition can only suggest what the experience of the completed buildings will be. It would seem, however, that to relax the act of contemplation even a little invites the museum to take over. At its best the new museum offers a stimulating dialogue between the container and the contained. But the dialogue may not be easily maintained if the hubbub and scale of the concourse become the most important experience a museum provides.

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Art

The Eakins retrospective

by Hilton Kramer

Thomas Eakins (1844-1916) was at once the most powerful and the most problematic American painter of his generation. In his lifetime he was also one of the most isolated. Outside a small circle of friends, family, students, and acolytes in the Philadelphia of his day, his art seems not to have elicited a very wide response. Historians have tended—a little too eagerly perhaps—to attribute this public resistance to Eakins's art to the genteel taste of the day, a taste that Eakins famously opposed. Yet I wonder if the spell cast by the genteel tradition entirely accounts for Eakins's failure to win a public for his art in his lifetime. For even today, when he is everywhere acclaimed as an American classic and generally thought to be the greatest American painter to emerge from the nineteenth century, his art remains curiously isolated.

No American painter in this century has found anything in it to build upon and develop. Realists like Henri and the painters of the Ashcan school paid it reverent lip service, but in practice they much preferred the kind of sparkling painterly virtuosity that Eakins scorned. In our day Eakins's putative heirs have strayed still further from the master's course, honoring him with their words but betraying him by their deeds. Andrew Wyeth, for example, has succeeded only in softening and sentimentalizing one aspect of the Eakins inheritance, while Raphael Soyer has reduced another aspect of this tough-minded art to the sheerest schmaltz. Even the revival of Realism in the last decade has not found in Eakins either an inspiration or a model. It has bypassed him altogether. However we may want to account for this phenomenon, it most certainly cannot be ascribed to any lingering attachment to the sentiments of the genteel tradition. We must look to Eakins himself—to his art, and to the special spirit that governed its development—to explain his peculiar isolation.

The Eakins retrospective organized by Darrell Sewell at the Philadelphia Museum of Art has given us a splendid opportunity to see this artist at full strength, and to explore the question of his oddly orphaned status in the presence of his greatest works.[1] It is unlikely that we shall ever again see an Eakins exhibition that improves on this one. More than one hundred and forty items—paintings, sculptures, watercolors, drawings, and photographs—have been assembled for this occasion, and while not every last one of them can be said to be a masterpiece, they all have something to contribute to an understanding of Eakins's achievement. If certain aspects of that achievement continue to elude us, it is not because anything important has been withheld.

What strikes one straightaway in this exhibition is the almost desperate earnestness that is present in Eakins's art, from the

1 "Thomas Eakins: Artist of Philadelphia" was shown at the Philadelphia Museum of Art from May 29 to August 1. A slightly abridged version of the exhibition will be on view at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston from September 22 to November 28.

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outset, as a formative impulse. An attitude of extreme moral gravity permeates the artist's every effort. It is obviously more important to him than anything that might be described as an "aesthetic" consideration. He is intent upon making his art a vehicle of truth, and truth is understood to be something verifiable—something that can be touched, measured, or dissected. For this purpose, science —whether involving the study of anatomy or discoveries in the mechanics of visual perception—is deemed a more reliable guide than anything to be found in art. Eakins was, in fact, deeply suspicious of the power of art to misrepresent life—and, given the inane conventions that governed so much of the official art of his time, who could blame him? But his interest in science was not, all the same, strictly scientific. It was moral. It was a way of keeping his art fixed on a truthful course.

It was inevitable, then, that the touchstone of an art conceived in such terms would come to rest on the question of representational accuracy. Even in an age which placed a high value on fidelity to nature in art, Eakins was something of a fanatic on this score. He carried it well beyond its customary limits, and at times even beyond the point where it yielded him a significant artistic result. In his preparations for painting *The Fairman Rogers Four-in-Hand* (1879-80), for example, Eakins not only observed and sketched this highly decorative horse-drawn vehicle in action, both in Philadelphia and in Newport, but also made use of the revelatory Eadweard Muybridge photographs of horses in motion that were first published only a year before work commenced on the picture. Muybridge's was the latest "scientific" research on this subject, and it was clearly the challenge of accurately representing the action of the four horses in the picture that captured Eakins's interest. With his usual zeal to be truthful in his depictions, he also made wax models directly from the horses. As Mr. Sewell reminds us, however, Eakins "corrected the horses' legs [in the wax models] to conform to the Muybridge photographs." Direct observation unaided by "scientific" verification was judged to be insufficient, and not only for the representation of horses. One of Eakins's students later recalled that the coach in the finished picture was actually painted from a perspective drawing supplied by the manufacturer.

It is not for this reason, however, that *The Fairman Rogers Four-in-Hand* is a surpassingly dull painting.[2] Artists less gifted than Eakins have contrived to produce far livelier pictures out of equally disparate materials and similarly contradictory principles. The real reason for the failure of the painting lies elsewhere. It lacks what for Eakins was always the essential element in art: a moral imperative. Representational accuracy, "scientific" or otherwise, was a necessary coefficient of this moral imperative in art, but it was not in itself a sufficient basis for it. That is one reason why much of Eakins's sculpture is now so boring. Sculpture for Eakins was largely a problem-solving medium. It was not a medium of expression. He used it to provide himself with models that would be anatomically correct and also offer certain clues to form. But it was in the painting, not the sculpture, that his forms were fully realized. Sculpture remained a tool. It was only in

2 Lloyd Goodrich, in his forthcoming monograph on Eakins, seems to me entirely correct in his judgment of this painting: "*A May Morning in the Park* [as *The Fairman Rogers Four-in-Hand* was originally called] may well be one of the first paintings produced anywhere in which the gaits of trotting horses are accurately represented. As representation of motion, down to such details as the blurring of the turning wheels, the picture records motion with complete truth. Yet it is arrested motion, naturalistically rendered, not movement in the forms themselves, as created by the masters of plastic movement. Eakins's own small Newport sketch conveys more sensation of movement, perhaps because it is more freely and broadly handled." (*Thomas Eakins,* Volume I, page 265.) Mr. Goodrich's two-volume study of the artist will be published in November by the Harvard University Press as part of the Ailsa Mellon Bruce Studies in American Art sponsored by the National Gallery of Art ($70 before January 1, 1983, $90 thereafter); it is certain to remain the definitive work on the artist for many years to come.

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painting that Eakins achieved—or indeed attempted—complete mastery.

Where we find that mastery most fully developed is in Eakins's portraits, and there his scientific interests are clearly subordinated to other, more compelling, concerns. In the portraits he also concentrated on realizing a certain kind of "truth," to be sure, but it was no longer a truth that could be measured or dissected. Truth in this realm had, perforce, to rely on observation, intuition, and empathy. Which is one reason why the portraits vary so much in their intensity of expression: much depended on the exact degree of Eakins's sympathetic interest in his subject. There was never any question of flattering the sitter. Nothing further from the suave, glittering embellishments of Sargent or Boldini could be imagined. And nothing is determined, as it so often is in Whistler's portraits, by considerations of design. In this respect, Eakins's portraits cannot be said to be in the least "inventive," and they are never stylish. They aim for a sort of Tolstoyan transparency in their depiction of character, and this can only be achieved when the painter is impelled by some inward identification with his subject to go beyond mere appearance. His strongest portraits, not surprisingly, are therefore usually confined to family and friends—to subjects he knew best—and of these it is usually the women who yield him the most memorable results.

Lloyd Goodrich, who began his studies of the painter more than half a century ago, was able to interview many of the women who sat for Eakins, and it is amusing to learn how persistent Eakins was—and how consistently he failed—in attempting to get them to take off their clothes and pose in the nude for him. (Many of these interviews are summarized in Mr. Goodrich's new monograph.) Interestingly, several of these women in their old age expressed some disappointment with themselves for not having acceded to Eakins's wishes. But this is not a disappointment we are likely to share. For neither then nor now could nudity be said to be an inducement to disinterested character study, and it was this, after all, that was Eakins's forte in portraiture. The few examples of the female nude he left us do not make us pine for any further examples of the genre. Nudity in art was something that Eakins tended to associate with allegory and myth—with some vague notion of the "Greek" past. It thus had the paradoxical effect of removing his subjects from life. It was only when they posed for him in their clothes that they acquired the requisite degree of reality for him.

Throughout the entire history of Realism in the nineteenth century one finds many similar attempts to universalize subjects drawn from contemporary life by attaching them to some mythological theme. It was as if the Realists themselves recognized that something was missing, after all, in the way they conceived of their work—an aspect of the heroic that had been lost to art when painters turned away from literary, mythological, historical, and religious themes in order to concentrate on the observation of life here and now. It is certainly interesting that even as dedicated a Realist as Eakins felt this urge to emulate the past, to attach his art to culture rather than to life. But, fortunately for his art, he did not really have a sensibility for allegorizing or mythologizing his materials.

Eakins was, perhaps, a narrower artist than he is commonly thought to be. In what Mr. Goodrich says about Eakins's teaching there is a judgment that may also be applied to his art—though this is not, I think, Mr. Goodrich's view. "The strengths of Eakins's teaching," he writes, "were bounded by its limitations. It was deep but not broad. Its concentration on naturalistic truths excluded many other elements of the work of art. There was no attention to the role of form, line, and color in creating design. There was little study of great art, past or present. The artists of the past whom he held up as examples (aside from the Greeks) were almost exclusively the seventeenth-century naturalists, particularly those of Spain. In nineteenth-century art his commendation, with some exceptions, was for the academics. He showed little awareness of current European trends; in any case, he would probably have

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opposed them. And his observations on other art were confined mostly to technical matters. His students were given a thoroughgoing naturalistic education; what they made of it was up to them. Most of them, as was inevitable, absorbed the naturalistic truths, but missed the qualities of form and design that made his own art vital, but which he did not formulate—perhaps even to himself."

The only thing missing from this account is the moral imperative that was so decisive in shaping Eakins's art, and it is this, I think, that offers us a clue to the isolation that the artist suffered in his lifetime and that continues to haunt his art down to the present day. The truth is, Eakins aspired to an integration of art and life that we no longer find persuasive. We are less suspicious of art than Eakins was, and more skeptical, perhaps, about the kinds of "truth" it may be capable of rendering. Our impulse is to back away from moral imperatives in art, and to take a larger and an easier view of its functions. And it may be that this is the reason why Eakins—at least the Eakins of the great portraits—has had no successors in American art.

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The last days of Jean-Paul Sartre

by Frederick Brown

In the third volume of her memoirs, *The Force of Circumstance,* Simone de Beauvoir wrote that she did not perceive death as a physical reality until 1954, when word reached her of Sartre's having been hospitalized, for unstated reasons, during a trip to the Soviet Union. Something "irrevocable" had happened, she declared. "Death had closed its hand around me; it was no longer a metaphysical scandal, it was a quality of our arteries, it was no longer a sheath of night around us, it was an intimate presence penetrating my life, changing the taste of things, the quality of the light, my memories, the things I wanted to do: everything." Although the German Occupation and the liberation of Paris had made violence commonplace, her quasi-symbiotic relationship with Sartre conferred upon her—or so this account might suggest—a sense of invulnerability that vanished the moment her intellectual mate began to falter.

Arteries are very much an issue in *La cérémonie des adieux,*[1] for this short work chronicles year by year the deterioration of Sartre's mind and body after 1970. The vertigo he experienced in Moscow was the first of many danger signals that went unheeded during the late Fifties and Sixties. To produce *The Critique of Dialectical Reason* and his 2800-page opus on Flaubert, *The Family Idiot* (where "falls" govern the whole interpretative scheme), Sartre often labored thirty hours at a stretch, popping amphetamines and smoking several packs of Boyard cigarettes a day. Why he drove himself so mercilessly is open to conjecture, but it may be worth recalling what de Beauvoir wrote about him as a young man in *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter,* that in his view the literary work was "an absolute end" that carried within itself "its *raison d'être,* its creator's, and even perhaps . . . the entire universe's." Absolute ends do not promote personal hygiene. Bound up with the fantasy of omnipotence and self-sacrifice, writing remained for Sartre a romantic vocation whose glory lay in its power to consume the writer. Consume him it did. By 1970, when he was sixty-five, his vascular system was a shambles.

De Beauvoir's memoir commences in September of that year. After he had drunk a quantity of vodka at dinner one Saturday evening, Sartre began dozing and let his cigarette fall from his lips. The next day he was sufficiently recovered to leave de Beauvoir's apartment for his own, but when they met several hours later, she found him unsteady on his feet: he bumped into furniture, reeled as they left a restaurant, and pitched forward while getting out of a cab. The dozen or so medical examinations he underwent during the next month brought to light a circulatory problem in the left hemisphere of his brain, and a general narrowing of the blood vessels.

In the next two years, there were other

1 *La cérémonie des adieux, suivi de Entretiens avec Jean-Paul Sartre,* by Simone de Beauvoir. Editions Gallimard, 559 pages.

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such episodes during which his mind would wander, and on one occasion he fell down, badly bruising himself about the head. It seems odd that a physician whom he consulted, in what soon became an excruciating round of consultations at the Salpêtrière hospital, should have given him a clean bill of health after reading his encephalogram, since just to walk cost him considerable pain, and the spells of drowsiness to which he was subject visited him more frequently. But this memoir contains much that is odd. Sartre himself showed no disposition to question diagnoses that flew in the face of evidence. His ideal doctor would have assured him that he need not forego the consolation he derived from whisky and tobacco, that his health was proof against his enemies, including above all himself, who could destroy it with impunity.

By 1973, his condition had grown significantly worse. In February he suffered a stroke that left his face distorted and one arm paralyzed. He recovered from these effects, but a subsequent stroke would twist his mouth into the permanent smile he wore during the last years of his life, and delusory states became a regular occurrence. "The weather was beautiful, Sartre was happy to be back in the Midi, he was reading detective novels," de Beauvoir recalls of the holiday they took that summer. "But he still had confusions. He had asked: 'Just what are we doing here? Oh yes! It's because of my fatigue. And then, we're waiting for Hercule Poirot.'" Further probes revealed that he was pre-diabetic, which did not persuade him to abstain from liquor, except for brief periods, and at the behest of de Beauvoir, who sometimes went about his flat hiding or uncovering bottles. Before long, diabetes set in, with all that that particularly aggressive disease can inflict upon the victim. When he died in 1980, his body was covered with gangrenous sores.

These ailments, horrible though they were, were tolerable in comparison with the one that ended his literary life. During the Spring of 1973, Sartre's vision began to dim. It was determined that he had suffered a thrombosis of the temporal vein and hemorrhaging inside his one good eye. Ophthalmologists made cheerful sounds until a test in October showed retinal degeneration of a kind often associated with diabetes. From then on, he progressed toward blindness, never altogether losing his sight, but retaining only as much of it as allowed him to make out blurred shapes, light, and color. After 1975, written words reached him through the mediation of Simone de Beauvoir and of other people in his entourage.

The Sartre Simone de Beauvoir portrays is a *Doppelgänger* whose connections with the living and with his own self became increasingly tenuous. Indeed, it may be said of this otherwise clinical narrative that its sadness has to do not only with the pain we imagine he endured (and the humiliation we imagine lies in store for us), but with the distance into which he receded as those who knew him best looked on helplessly. Even when he possessed the strength to argue causes that had always been of great importance to him, he did so in a remembered way, with little of the spark that had once ignited his intellect. "Things slid over him and, as all his friends remarked, he was distant, somewhat asleep, almost gloomy, with a smile of indiscriminate gentleness frozen on his lips," notes de Beauvoir, who says enough to suggest that his death came almost as a relief from the despair of organizing her life around an intimate ghost and inhabiting the vacancy of his presence. *Vide* is a word one often encounters in *La cérémonie des adieux*. Sartre himself would use it when the need to confide thoughts about his inner life prevailed over the discretion he normally observed.

Recording interminable conversations with Sartre on Sartre would seem to have been one strategy by which de Beauvoir proposed to fill the emptiness (those they held during the summer of 1974 are included here; they occupy some four hundred pages and dwarf the memoir itself). Revisiting places they had enjoyed together in a happier time was certainly another. Still the indefatigable tourist she had always been, de Beauvoir accompanied Sartre on holidays to Aix,

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Geneva, the Greek islands, Capri, Rome, and again and again to Venice. But the passages that show him stumbling in befuddlement through a landscape of antiquities or reading detective novels against a backdrop of noble monuments or staring blankly from a terrace at the Provençal countryside only amplify for us, as they must have for her, the sense of his diminution. He looks at the great Roman aqueduct called the Pont du Gard, which any French schoolchild would instantly recognize, and wonders if it's a nineteenth-century bridge. While he walks in the old Campus Martius, oblivious to the Pantheon, he raves about a family of cats pissing on him. So much for Edouard Herriot's aphorism that "culture is what's left when one has forgotten everything else." On the European stage, where they used to tour as the king and queen of intellect, de Beauvoir became a prompter and Sartre a naked old man missing cues. Never were his movements more confined than during these journeys, which exposed him to a truth that could be denied, or at least fudged, in the busy routine of life on the Left Bank.

Perhaps Sartre's persistent denunciations of "a regime that keeps us all locked in a concentrationary universe" were to some extent inspired by the despotic order illness imposed. When his mind lapsed on one occasion, de Beauvoir heard him fantasize about a "preface" (Sartre was generous with prefaces, as he was with money) to be written for "a young man who had attempted suicide because his parents were holding him prisoner." But one infers from what she writes that his own self was another formerly cherished idea with which he came to live on terms of dispassionate, even remote, familiarity. There is great pathos in the scene de Beauvoir evokes of Sartre asking her, during lunch at the Coupole, whether she found him as intelligent as before—like a ruined beau wanting a withered belle to flatter him, or Garcin trying to make Inès his accomplice (in *No Exit*).

Such petitions were rare. Little by little he relinquished his claim upon the powers he had had and presented himself as a survivor existing more or less at peace with himself beyond the grave of his literary *oeuvre*. "I am not in fact dead. I eat and I drink, but I am dead in so far as my work is finished," she quotes him as saying. During an interview with Michel Contat, he declared: "My occupation as a writer is completely destroyed. . . . In one sense it robs me of all reason for existing: I was, and I am no longer, if you wish. I should feel very defeated, but for some unknown reason I feel quite good: I am never sad, nor do I have any moments of melancholy in thinking of what I have lost."

Limbo would not have been quite so agreeable without the clique of women who spelled one another in ministering to his needs. They were, among others, de Beauvoir and her young companion, Sylvie le Bon; the actress Wanda Kosakiewicz, whose older sister, Olga, had once threatened to supplant de Beauvoir in Sartre's affections; Michèle Vian, who had taken up with Sartre after her separation from Boris; and Arlette Elkaïm, who had become his mistress in 1956, when she was a lycée graduate preparing for the Ecole Normale, and his adopted daughter eight years later, when she was in danger of being deported as an Algerian national.

Their names recur on almost every page and induce something of the same dizziness one can experience reading a Feydeau farce as de Beauvoir summarizes the rendezvous they made every day to collect Sartre here or deliver him there, to eat with him, tuck him in, fetch him at hospitals and airports. "At Wanda's, Sartre had more or less fallen down. She had put him in a taxi; in front of the Dôme café, Michèle was waiting to accompany him to his flat; there he had again lost his balance several times. In the morning, she had driven him to Arlette's and he had fallen once more. I got him on the phone: his voice was clear but weary. He lunched with Arlette, who brought him home in a friend's car."

The privileges that attended invalidism were not lost on Sartre. Like that fatherless only child he describes in *Words* who was considered by his family a gift from heaven, he delighted in being an object of common

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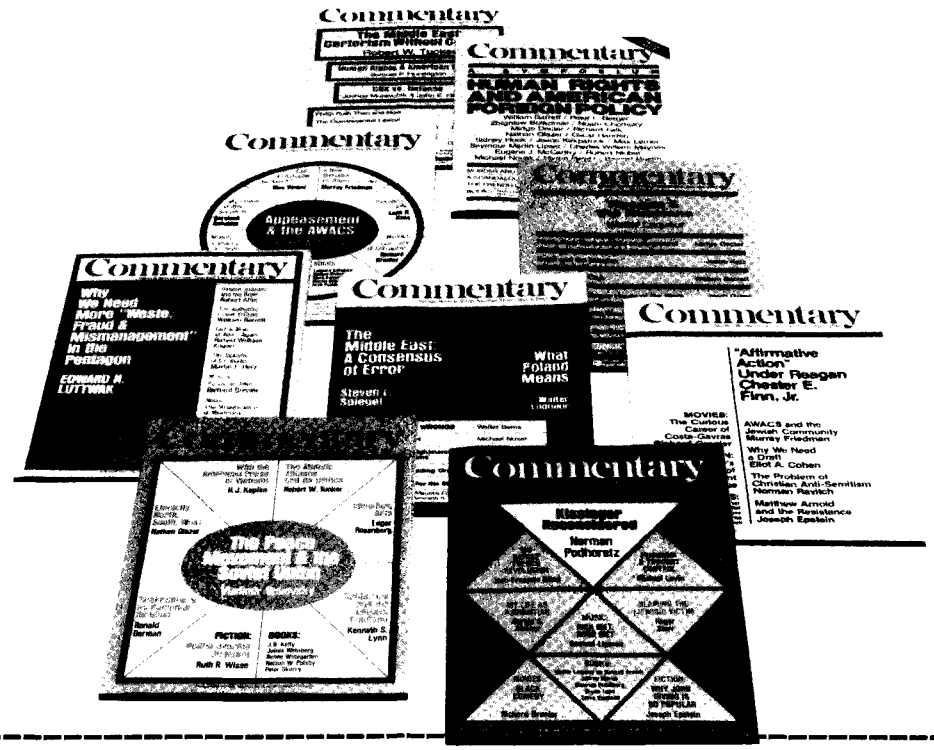
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devotion and told de Beauvoir: "I have never pleased women more than I do now." Did this fuss his harem made over him promote a kind of regression? De Beauvoir suggests as much. The shamelessness with which he admitted being incontinent struck her as an indication that the puritan whose self-esteem was vested in language had succumbed on some level to an infant who did not distinguish his refuse from himself.

Why did Simone de Beauvoir work her journals into this remarkably circumstantial memoir? She claims in the preface to have written it for those of Sartre's friends who would like to know more about his last years and surmises that with it she will have made her own valedictory. *La cérémonie des adieux* is thus characterized by its author as a labor of love and as a twofold gesture of farewell. The title comes from Sartre, who said to her, as they prepared to go their separate ways one summer: *"Alors, c'est la cérémonie des adieux!"* Accompanied by an enigmatic smile, the expression seemed to her fraught with terrible significance.

But it is hard to read her book, or the passages in which she recalls Sartre's relationship with a certain Benni Lévi, and not conclude that farewells can provide an excellent occasion for parting shots. Benni Lévi, alias Pierre Victor, was one of those voluble young ideologues whose voices would never have been heard much beyond the Latin Quarter cafés they frequented if not for May 1968, which brought them into sudden prominence. Under the *nom de guerre* he presumably acquired during the insurrection, Lévi became director of a Maoist group known as the "Gauche Prolétarienne," the G.P., and expounded, in Marxist-Leninist terms, the need for a popular movement outside the Communist Party that would abolish the bourgeois republic.

His views were compatible with those of Sartre, who had come to believe that intellectuals, embodying the Hegelian "unhappy consciousness," would not achieve real coherence until they merged with the mass, that only this merger would enable them to transcend the contradiction between their knowledge, which claims universality, and their social origin in the ruling class. The briefs he wrote after 1968 all vilify authority (save his own, which he denied having), elites, bureaucratic structure, reflective life. They evoke a moral society predicated upon absolute egalitarianism, to be brought about by the "people" asserting its freedom from masters who alienate or "reify" humanity. "The source of all justice is the people," he proclaimed. "I have chosen popular justice as the most profound and the only true kind." Although Sartre found anarchism the most congenial theory of government, his political discourse reveals a partiality to hermetic modes of thought that would have stood him in good stead during the Terror. Indeed, dicta such as "Revolutionary violence is immediately moral because the workers become the subjects of their history" and "[the intellectual] must not speak but try, with the means he has at his disposal, to give speech to the people" are hardly distinguishable from the statements that constituted Jacobin orthodoxy in 1793-94. Against "bureaucratic" justice Sartre upheld what he liked to call "wild" justice (*justice sauvage*), the consummation of which would be a world with no room in it for the intellectual processes bourgeois capitalist society develops and honors. He was, it could be said, intent on arguing out of existence everything that had formed Jean-Paul Sartre, while following a line that denounced as evil any force, convention, or authority that made Jean-Paul Sartre less than whole.

To suggest that this anti-intellectualism, which is essentially Marxist, grew on Sartre as he felt his intellectual powers wane would be wrong, for much of his previous work, including the famous phrase, "Hell is the other," anticipates it. The decline of his powers may, however, help explain his infatuation with Benni Lévi, in whom he saw not only the "new philosopher" combining manual and intellectual activity, but an Alcibiades combining male and female qualities. "What immediately pleased me when I saw you was the fact that you seemed much more intelligent than most of the political types I had

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met, especially the Communists, and much freer," he told Lévi in a conversation published by *Libération*. "Above all, you didn't refuse to address topics other than political ones. In other words, you could edge away from the matter at hand and have the kind of conversation I like to have with women. . . . You're a bloke with feminine qualities." Through Lévi, Sartre dreamed of playing a Socratic role with the generation that came of age in 1968 and of recapturing French youth, who had jilted him for other philosophical heroes.

Thus began a collaboration no one could have foreseen. After publishing their conversations about leftist thought since 1968, *On a raison de se révolter,* they addressed the problem of "power and freedom" in a dialogue that kept them quite busy throughout the 1970s. By 1974, Sartre had appointed Lévi his secretary and relied upon him increasingly not only to serve as his reader but to act as his spokesman. This liaison caused great consternation among Sartre's older friends. De Beauvoir, Horst, and Pouillon all found the demagogic style in which Lévi usually held forth more praiseworthy at rallies than at editorial board meetings of *Les Temps Modernes,* which he attended. But such grievances as they brought to Sartre fell on deaf ears. What he liked about Lévi was precisely the bullyboy, the *enragé* devoid of the scruples and manners that he felt had inhibited him.[2] "He appreciated in him the radical nature of his ambitions," asserts de Beauvoir, "the fact that, like Sartre himself, he wanted all. 'Naturally, one does not achieve all, but one must want all.'"

In the account de Beauvoir gives, trouble arose when the surrogate turned his pugnacity upon the master and sought to exchange roles. The pretext for this switch was, oddly enough, Judaism. As 1968 faded into the past, Lévi, who could not sustain a conviction except in the turmoil of some dramatic event, grew disenchanted with Marxist-Leninist dialectics. His intellectual life required live audiences, great theaters, messianic occasions. So it was that the ex-Maoist came in due course to embrace the God of his fathers (he was an Egyptian Jew) and, what is more, to urge religion upon Jean-Paul Sartre. For this proselytical campaign, Lévi received encouragement from Arlette Elkaïm, herself an Algerian Jewess, who joined him in studying Hebrew. "Victor believes categorically that the origin of all ethics lies in the Torah, but I don't agree with him at all!" de Beauvoir reports Sartre as exclaiming one day.

Willy-nilly, Sartre lent himself to Lévi's ventriloquistic exercises, perhaps because he was afraid the dialogue in which he had found a *raison d'être* might end, or simply because truth-telling was no longer worth a quarrel. In 1978, the two, along with Arlette, spent five days in Jerusalem questioning Israelis and Palestinians on the likely consequences of Sadat's recent visit. Soon afterward, the *Nouvel Observateur* published a report signed by Sartre and Lévi which, to judge from its general tone, the latter had written by himself. Several years passed and on the eve of Sartre's death the *Nouvel Observateur* brought out yet another "collaborative" piece, this one an interview. "Victor didn't express any of his opinions directly; he fobbed them off on Sartre, playing, in the name of goodness knows what revealed truth, the part of attorney," de Beauvoir contends. "His tone, the arrogant superiority he assumed over Sartre were revolting to those of us who had read the text before its appearance."

La cérémonie des adieux brings to mind a novel by the Goncourt brothers, *Manette Salomon,* in which a painter of genius falls under the bewitching influence of a Jewess who lures him into the ghetto, estranges him from his friends, and finally renders him impotent. One wonders if Simone de Beauvoir did not intend, with this memoir, to suggest that the Sartre whom outsiders had taken hostage was Jean-Paul Sartre only in name. Betrayed by her lifelong consort, who

2 He had also found the pug in Camus enormously attractive: "There was a side of him that smacked of the little Algerian tough guy, very much a hooligan, very funny. He was probably the last good friend I had."

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betrayed himself, she emerges as the polestar of his wandering soul. "Victor was supported by Arlette, who knew nothing about Sartre's philosophical works" is the sort of remark, made *en passant* and ostensibly without rancor, that puts her reborn Jewish rivals in their place forever. What we have at the end are two couples, the false one of Arlette Elkaïm and Lévi-Victor, and the true one of Simone de Beauvoir and Sartre, who are joined again in a final scene, with de Beauvoir lying beside Sartre's corpse. "I asked to be left alone with Sartre and I wanted to stretch out beside him under the sheet," she writes. "A nurse stopped me: 'No. Be careful . . . gangrene.' That's when I learned the true nature of his sores. I lay down on the sheet and slept a little. At five o'clock, some orderlies came. They folded a sheet and a kind of garment bag over Sartre's body, and they carried him away."

Tocqueville revisited

Richard Reeves American Journey: Travelling with Tocqueville in Search of Democracy in America. Simon & Schuster, 399 pages, $15.95

reviewed by Robert Nisbet

It is a rare month when a newspaper column, article, or book doesn't appear in which Alexis de Tocqueville is either featured or made the authority for views on man and society ranging from the ideological Left to the Right. In 1925 a Frenchman, Antoine Redier, wrote a biographical study of Tocqueville entitled *Comme Disait M. de Tocqueville.* Today the phrase "as Tocqueville said" fills the literary and political atmosphere: effects like those to be had in the 1920s with "as Mencken said" or "as Dorothy Parker said" are now achieved almost exclusively by citing Tocqueville, although in the latter case wisdom is the holy grail instead of wit and humor. Someone, Max Beloff I think, has aptly referred to "the Tocqueville industry."

It wasn't always this way. In America, after a period of considerable popularity for Tocqueville during the generation that followed publication of an English translation of *Democracy in America,* Tocqueville's fortunes as sage and prophet began to wane. Both James Bryce and Woodrow Wilson praised him late in the nineteenth century, but theirs were the tributes of scholars and unusual even for their kind. It is fair to say that between about 1870 and 1935 Tocqueville was largely ignored by both scholars and the public.

Things began to change in the 1930s, the decade of the centenary of publication of *Democracy in America*: George Pierson brought out his magisterial *Tocqueville and Beaumont in America,* J.P. Mayer his *Tocqueville: Prophet of the Mass Age.* Phillips Bradley and Albert Salomon, among others, wrote important articles on Tocqueville before the outbreak of World War II.

What was still a stream began to assume the proportions of a river after 1945, the year Alfred A. Knopf brought out a handsome new edition, the first since 1912, of *Democracy in America,* skillfully edited by Phillips Bradley, who had been teaching Tocqueville to students in this country since the 1920s. By 1950 intellectual interest in Tocqueville had become strong, almost sufficient to challenge the hegemony of Marx. Rare indeed was the course in politics, or the journal in the social sciences, that did not after 1950 regularly spray "as Tocqueville said" around the republic of letters. He was at first merely interesting to American intellectuals, then actually crucial to their intellectual development. By now Tocqueville has become eminently fashionable, which may prove his undoing.

Richard Reeves tells us that the idea for *American Journey* came upon him a few years ago when a friend presented him with a copy of Tocqueville's *Journey to America,* the title given by J.P. Mayer and George Lawrence to their translation of the notebooks Tocqueville kept during the nine months he spent in this country with his companion Beaumont in 1831-32. "I was in awe," Reeves writes. "I was looking at the notes for what was proba-

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bly the best book ever written about my country, my people." (It is far from the best, but I'll come back to that later.) "I decided," Reeves continues, "that whatever else I did, I would try to take those notes and recreate Tocqueville's journey: travel the same roads, see the same things or what had replaced them, talk to modern counterparts of the men and women he questioned." And so he did, touching every city or major town that Tocqueville and Beaumont touched, from Newport, Boston, New York, and Philadelphia in the East to Nashville, Memphis, and New Orleans in the deep South, and winding up, as Tocqueville wound up, in Washington, D.C.

There are differences of emphasis, to be sure. Tocqueville's notes were those of an elegant, profoundly conservative young aristocrat interested in the United States much as a sociobiologist is interested in a community of birds or animals. Unlike Martineau, Chevalier, Bryce, and so many other foreign visitors, Tocqueville and Beaumont came to America by sheer accident, not out of any deep-seated interest in Americans. Tocqueville never returned to this country; nine months were obviously enough, in his mind at least, for direct observation.

Richard Reeves is every bit the American liberal, with pretty much the Easterner's (or Californian's) views on everything, ranging from the virtues of the media, popular culture, egalitarianism, and centralized government to the baleful effects of business and commerce—in short, the kinds of views that the media have been offering up, habitually and unrelentingly, for years. This fact is related to one handicap that Reeves or anyone else must carry in an enterprise such as this: we have become saturated by media descriptions of American life and opinion. It is no doubt partly for that reason that Reeves elected to make Tocqueville's notebooks the sacred text. It can be plausibly argued that, although the market is stuffed with reportorial "discoveries" of what the good folk of Kansas City and Nashville think, it is not yet stuffed with the magic essence of Tocqueville.

Reeves begins his journey in Newport, as

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Tocqueville and Beaumont did. They seem to have found it a charming town with citizens "very much like French people." For the two young aristocrats it was an auspicious beginning. For Reeves, though, Newport is a place with seventy-nine radio stations, an all-night news agency that has two hundred and fifty different magazines for sale, and a mediocre newspaper that prints mostly what the people, as studied in market surveys, want to read. Reeves finds here an opportunity to lament the commercialism, the desire for simple profit, that has come over newspapers since Tocqueville's time.

In Albany, Reeves interviews the governor of New York just as Tocqueville did a century and a half earlier. Governor Carey agrees with Reeves that people in public life just aren't what they used to be, at least in the quality of their service. "I don't find the same level of people in government that I find in other fields," Carey asserts. Reeves seems unaware that this sentiment has been uttered in the United States ever since the first generation of the Puritan theocracy departed this earth.

In Ithaca, through which Tocqueville and Beaumont passed in their journey, Reeves is happy to discover professors at Cornell who readily echo his own sentiments about commerce and life. Thus Cushing Strout reduces Reeves to appreciative laughter when he declares Puritanism, "mutual surveillance," and "demonic commerce" to be the essence of the American dream. Reeves finds equally apposite, and apparently novel, another Cornell faculty member's use of the phrase "totalitarian democracy" to describe "the conformity he saw underneath American celebrations of diversity, individualism, and freedom."

Reeves has a fondness for academic pundits that Tocqueville assuredly hadn't, and their generally predictable commentaries on the American mind and its defects in this age of "demonic commerce" provide almost as much choral continuity in the book as do the innumerable Tocqueville citations. Reeves has no difficulty whatever in making his way to the professorial Left for its insights. While at Rochester he interviews Christopher Lasch and Eugene Genovese (the latter, it is explained, because a decade or more ago Genovese stirred a commotion by favoring the North Vietnamese soldiers in the war we were engaged in; there is no reference to Genovese's impressive credentials as an historian). He does not see fit to visit someone like Allen Wallis—distinguished and original economist, social critic, and university president—but then Wallis is known to be a conservative.

Tocqueville was interested in equality and inequality and so is Reeves, chiefly in the context of white-black relationships. He accepts without qualification Tocqueville's dour and quite inaccurate ruminations on "the tyranny of the majority," applying them to the white majority and the black minority in America. Bryce was only one of the many analysts of the United States who failed to locate evidence of this "tyranny." Reeves is confident though that "if there were to be a tyranny in America . . . it would be a tyranny of the majority—and it would begin by making the streets safe for that majority." Well, we can hope. But minorities have been running things from the beginning of human history, and there is no sign of their hegemony coming to an end. It might be noted here that Tocqueville himself had a very difficult time with his concept of majority-tyranny once he commenced writing *Democracy in America*. He was certainly a great deal more uncertain about his concept than Part I of that work suggests.

In Nashville—to no one's surprise by this point in the book—Reeves encounters much racist, anti-black thinking. "They don't know how to work. . . . They're people who have been given everything," etc. One of Reeves's interlocutors remembers that President Jackson "wasn't such a bad man, he just didn't believe Indians were human beings." To which Reeves writes in his notebook: "Our conversation—about blacks this century—didn't seem that different to me."

Of course Reeves might, just might, have turned his attention away from the chit-chat of Nashville, Montgomery, and New Orleans

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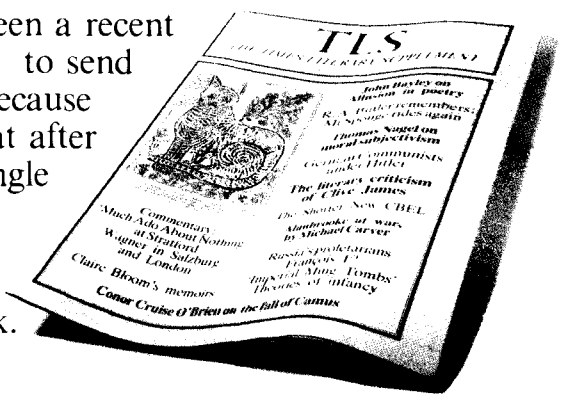
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and toward the actual, recorded, and multifold consequences of *Brown* v. *Topeka,* the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the numberless federal court decisions since then which have in themselves worked almost revolutionary change. He might have made mention of the constantly rising number of black legislators in the South and in the rest of the country. He might too have sounded out some of the successful middle-class blacks who are not leaders of professional civil-rights organizations; they are to be found in every city Reeves visited. Considering Reeves's preoccupation with the subject, he might also have telephoned if not visited the black economist Thomas Sowell for his views on what is chiefly responsible for the position many blacks find themselves in today. But those are views which would grate on the white liberal conscience and possibly set back the workings of the guilt machine. In any event, it was easier for Reeves to sit and talk with that longtime Kennedy liberal (and now editor of a Nashville newspaper) John Siegenthaler about white majority tyranny and its indifference to blacks. Siegenthaler believes that the white consensus is: "Look, we've done enough for the bastards. If they make it, fine. If they can't, that's their problem." How many times, one wonders, has that hackneyed and utterly unrepresentative point of view been the basis of television documentaries and newspaper series during the past fifteen years?

The question could be properly asked about a great many of the conclusions Reeves arrives at on the basis of his American journey. No doubt that is another reason why he found the invocation of Tocqueville so attractive. The monotony of his book's message could be relieved in some degree by establishing a kind of counterpoint between Tocqueville's observations and his own. If not counterpoint, continuity. But at all costs, a Tocqueville connection.

Unfortunately it is Reeves's use of Tocqueville that constitutes the largest failing of the book. The truth is, Tocqueville was not a very acute observer of the United States, all conventional wisdom on this point notwithstanding. (I shall come to the reason in a moment.) Moreover, there is only the most tenuous relation between Tocqueville's notebooks and *Democracy in America.* If, after his return to Paris, Tocqueville had actually been confined to his notebooks, it is fair to say that that classic would never have been written, not even Part I, which is more strictly reportorial than Part II. His notebooks were simply inadequate to the task.

James Schleifer, in *The Making of Tocqueville's Democracy in America,* has shown in detail the gulf that existed between the notebooks and the masterpiece that came forth in two parts after close to nine years of labor. What was required was what Schleifer's teacher, George Pierson, called Tocqueville's "second voyage" to America. The notebooks were nearly useless, and that is why Tocqueville, after anguish and indecision that almost immobilized him as a writer, hired the services of two young Americans in Paris for much of the needed research on American government and society. They would fill a great many of the lacunae in the notebooks. And that is why Tocqueville himself plunged into sustained reading of works on American government, most of them by American lawyers and jurists with a decidedly Federalist bent of mind.

The visit to the United States may have had a tonic effect on Tocqueville's will to do, or to begin, the work on democracy that he had nursed in aspiration ever since he attended Guizot's famous lectures at the Sorbonne on European civilization; but in all truth, Tocqueville could have produced *Democracy in America* just as well, I would argue, if he had never visited the United States. The "second voyage" would have done him as much good in Part I as it did in Part II, where reference to America is almost a charade at times, so little does it bear upon the actuality of the United States in 1830.

Nothing I say—least of all my references to what James Schleifer has written—is designed for a moment to denigrate either *Democracy in America* or its author. I agree with Hugh Brogan that Schleifer has actually

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made Tocqueville into a far more interesting figure. He was by no means "always wise," as Lord Acton described him simply on the basis of reading the book. Through Schleifer's rich disclosures of how Tocqueville actually worked and wrote, we are able to see him as possessed of a frequently undecided, confused, and ambiguous mind, one often at war with itself. More positively, we are also able to see the workings of intuition, mysticism, and highly abstract reflection, and of Tocqueville's passionate preoccupation with his own France.

Part II of *Democracy in America,* published only after five years of brooding and obsessive thought on democracy as an ideal type, should never have been tied to Part I, and it is probable that Tocqueville wouldn't have connected them had Part I not been so instantaneously successful with the book-buying public and the critics alike. For market reasons it was tempting to join the two works. Reviewers were not taken in, however, and the complaint was frequent that Tocqueville, while pretending to write about American democracy, was actually writing almost exclusively about European democracy, especially the French version. Part II is one of the greatest works of political philosophy in the history of mankind; it is boundlessly rich in its insights and perspectives on democracy considered in the abstract. But essentially it is a work of intuition, and, *pace* Reeves (who is forced often to abandon the notebooks for one or another part of *Democracy in America* in order to sustain his Tocqueville obligato), it bears nothing more than an occasional relation to the American notebooks.

This leads us to a second and related failing of Reeves's use or exploitation of Tocqueville: his certainty that *Democracy in America* is "perhaps the best book ever written" on America and its people. It is emphatically not. Nor is it what Harold Laski called it—"the best book on one country ever written by a citizen of another." Bryce's *American Commonwealth,* the first of its many editions published in 1888, is probably the best single book on

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American society and government. Certainly it is superior in this respect—but in no other—to Tocqueville's work. And if we choose to enter Laski's universe of comparison, we had best not forget Doughty's *Arabia Deserta* for starters. Nor should we forget that Harriet Martineau and Michel Chevalier, each of whom, independently, spent a respectable period of time in the United States in the 1830s, wrote books on American life and manners, and, most important, on American institutions which are considerably more perceptive than Tocqueville's on America.

One could write a substantial volume on the America of 1830 using nothing more than what Tocqueville failed to see or what he was indifferent to. He was almost ludicrously wrong in his assessment of the American woman and marriage, he failed to see the great steps already taken in technology and manufacturing in the United States, and he was uninterested in the American educational system, which at its top had more than a hundred colleges, including Harvard, Yale, and Columbia, which he could so easily have visited. Tocqueville never got the governments of our states down right, even after the "second voyage" to America. And one would never guess, especially from reading his dour and gloomy forebodings of American literary culture, that a spectacular literary and philosophical renaissance was already burgeoning in the United States while he and Beaumont were here. Nor, finally, is there much if any evidence in Tocqueville's writing, his notebooks included, of the kind of affection for a country and its people that would seem to be required of the writer of genuinely good travel commentary. Bryce loved America and Americans; he visited America from one coast to the other many times before he published his *American Commonwealth*.

The reason for Tocqueville's deficiency as a reporter is not far to seek. It is contained in the Introduction he wrote to Part I of his book. "I confess that in America I saw more than America; I sought there the *image of democracy itself*, its character, its prejudices, and its passions, in order to learn what we have to fear or hope from its progress." (Italics added.) Tocqueville came to the United States with pictures in his head, pictures of democracy and its revolutionary impact on traditional European, aristocratic society. With that fact in mind, I suppose we can be grateful for what Tocqueville *did* see on his journey. The result, nine years later, was a work of philosophical genius but also a work with a highly inadequate appreciation of America.

The next time someone exploits what he can of the Tocqueville industry, he had better leave the notebooks at home—though undeniably they occasionally make charming reading—and work directly from, say, Tocqueville's *Recollections*. No one ever observed a country in revolution more brilliantly and perceptively than Tocqueville observed the France of 1848. In that book genius-philosopher and journalist combine fruitfully indeed.

The art of the catalogue

Jim M. Jordan and Robert Goldwater
The Paintings of Arshile Gorky: A Critical Catalogue. New York University Press, 576 pages, $75

reviewed by E.V. Thaw

The scholarly enterprise of compiling a "catalogue raisonné," which attempts to provide us with a definitive listing of every work in an artist's *oeuvre*, is less than a century old, and in the present era of over-production of art books it appears to be in greater vogue than ever. Its utility is self-evident, but only, of course, if the author-scholar undertaking the task brings the requisite objectivity and reliability to its execution. An unreliable catalogue raisonné compiled with a clear bias, a poor eye, or too insecure a grasp of the subject can wreak havoc on the study and collecting of an artist for many years. The intense study of an artist is in fact the primary pur-

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pose that is meant to be served by such an analytical compendium of every scrap of an artist's work that is known to exist. But it serves the art market as well. The collector wants to know and the dealer or auctioneer must be able to answer: "Is the Daumier in Maison, the Corot in Robaut, the Renoir in Daulte, the Picasso in Zervos, the Degas in Lemoisne?" If the work is not included in the standard catalogue a lot of explaining is necessary.

This kind of art book comes in many styles, from the luxurious multi-volume limited editions favored by the French to the cheap but useful spin-offs produced by Rizzoli. Sometimes the catalogue is simply appended to a monograph—as in Will Grohmann's *Kandinsky,* for instance, or Jacques Dupin's *Miró.* Although for the most part books of this sort encompass only paintings, a few encompass drawings and other media as well; the catalogues for Daumier, Lautrec, and Seurat are examples.

Generally, the artist will have been dead for some time before a catalogue raisonné is undertaken. There are exceptions, though: Picasso saw much of his work published in many volumes by Zervos before his death, and today Jean Dubuffet is regularly recording every piece from his studio in *"fascicules"* of his own catalogue, which he publishes himself. For the deceased artist who has left a wife, a family, and an estate—the usual situation for American painters of the twentieth century—cooperation from the family and access to the estate, its holdings and its records, are essential to the catalogue. Indeed, such cooperation, once given, is conceived of as the "imprimatur" of authority for the book and especially for its judgments concerning the inclusion or rejection of certain works. It is well known, of course, that artists and their survivors often prove to be unreliable sources about the work they have been so close to—for reasons both innocent and mischievous. Still, they remain the witnesses whose evidence must be sought and evaluated. When a large body of work survives in an artist's estate, however haphazard the accumulation, it provides us with much information that cannot be deduced from the better known work, now exhibited and collected, which left the studio and got out into the world.

In serving its primary purpose—the intensive study of the artist—the catalogue raisonné seldom tells us much about those works we already know, that is, about the famous paintings upon which a reputation rests. But it tells us an enormous amount about beginnings, failed paintings, transitional works, and the influences from other artists. Ideally, it affords that overview of a whole career which shows that any artist worth our attention is a more complex and various creature than the knowledge based only on well-known paintings suggests.

It is in this regard that *The Paintings of Arshile Gorky: A Critical Catalogue,* by Jim M. Jordan and Robert Goldwater, is a welcome and useful addition to the field. Simply in terms of its design and organization, it falls somewhere between a multi-volume production and the small-plate appendage to a monograph. Indeed, it was originally planned as a book *about* Gorky by Goldwater, to be accompanied by a catalogue by Jordan. Unfortunately, Goldwater's untimely death in 1973 deprived us of that book. The placing of his name on the present volume is more an act of homage than an acknowledgement of authorship. His only contribution here is a short, lucid book review written for the *Saturday Review* in 1962.

Jim M. Jordan, chairman of the art department at Dartmouth College, has compiled the core of the book, which is the photographic record of every painting by Gorky he could find, together with a record of ownership, exhibitions, and publications. This valuable, objective, and critically neutral task, which has been executed with the full cooperation of Gorky's widow and with access to the estate, seems to have been thoroughly done. Its usefulness is diminished, however, by occasional coy mannerisms, stylistic inconsistencies, and careless citations. The provenance of a painting, for instance, which means its previous ownership history, is taken by Jordan to include the present owner, who is

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also listed separately. The works in the estate are catalogued this way:

Collection: Private collection
Provenance: Estate of Arshile Gorky
Private collection

This really does not clarify a great deal. Then, too, dealers are quite often left out of the provenance. Even Xavier Fourcade, the agent representing the estate and one of the people credited in the introduction with having supported the book financially, is not mentioned as the source for the recent purchases by the National Gallery in Washington. A private dealer is listed as Mr. Harold Diamond, but a collector is given only as Edward Root. The world-famous Italian collector, Carlo Frua de Angeli, appears as "? Fruart d'Angeli."

There are a few other grounds for criticism. The overview of Gorky's artistic production is somewhat marred by its being organized sometimes by date, sometimes by subject matter. Year follows year properly and cogently for a while; then suddenly we find Gorky's figure paintings lumped together irrespective of their year, and later his flower paintings. Except for a list of titles, the catalogue has no index—and indexes are enormously important to books of this sort. So are illustrations: the book's black and white plates are only adequate for identification; they are not handsome in themselves. And the book's ten color plates are merely a nod in the direction of the profuse color reproductions the public expects these days in any art book.

The Paintings of Arshile Gorky contains a long explanatory text by Jordan, which is really a period by period descriptive survey of Gorky's career and work emphasizing his early and transitional themes, which are less known. As Jordan points out, the fully developed, surrealist abstract paintings of the last four years have been amply discussed.[1] While full of useful facts and thoughtful insights about Gorky's struggles and the influences that shaped his work, this introduction argues against an enemy that just isn't there.

Gorky, as we all knew long before this catalogue appeared—and indeed, as even his friends remarked—was a slavish imitator of artists he admired or whose work he thought held the keys to modernism. His versions of Cézanne, his cribs from Braque, and his long concentration on Picasso go beyond the normal "influences" that are discernible in the development of any artist who is mastering his craft. In Gorky's case the imitation is often so crass as to be embarrassing, and there are paintings in this catalogue which in other contexts would simply be termed "fake" Picassos or Cézannes.

While fully acknowledging this pattern of derivation and dependency, particularly in the case of Picasso, Jordan argues that Gorky was not really copying, but "absorbing." When we arrive at the mature last period, however—the 1943-47 span which saw the production of such Gorky masterworks as *Betrothal, Calendars,* and *Agony*—the clear and pervasive influence of Miró and, to a lesser extent, of Matta is only grudgingly acknowledged. This I believe to be a serious mistake. A comparison of many of Gorky's late, culminating paintings with the Mirós of the 1930s seen in New York exhibitions or illustrated in most of the same publications from which Gorky also derived his "Picassos" demonstrates the clear assimilation of nearly identical forms and pictorial strategies. Although Gorky painted some of the most truly beautiful paintings produced in New York in his time, he was never an original artist in the fullest sense. In his eagerness to keep *au courant* with what was happening in Paris he was a kind of artistic Vicar of Bray.

Nor, despite his close association with other artists of the New York School, was Gorky really caught up in the "action paint-

1 Unfortunately, Jordan's text must have been completed before the appearance of Harry Rand's *Arshile Gorky: The Implication of Symbols* (Allanheld & Schram, 1981), which reaches many conclusions about Gorky's work and its content different from Jordan's.

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ing" of the great generation of American painters who flowered after the Second World War. Both this catalogue and other recent literature on Gorky reveal how deliberately he worked on those apparently "spontaneous" and "informal" paintings. We now know that he painted closely repetitive versions of many of them, almost line for line. Indeed, one of the discoveries of this book is yet another version of the paintings *Betrothal I* and *Betrothal II* of 1947, which we were already astounded to find so similar for an artist of this period. Shades of Delacroix or Chardin!

About all of this—Gorky's derivations and his place vis-à-vis the Abstract Expressionists—it is Robert Goldwater who gives the best account, in the two pages of his reprinted book review. It is an intelligent assessment of Gorky and his real achievement, without apologies or polemics, directed implicitly at those who would make of Gorky either more or less than he was:

> Gorky's career presents three apparent enigmas: the paradoxical fusion, in his impressively theatrical personality, of public performance and private emotion, external pretense and internal sincerity; the unseemly length of his pre-1943 apprenticeship in the shadow of Picasso's art, a period too long for an artist who possessed the powers of individual creation he later showed; and the disturbing preservation, within the personal vision of the last years, of obvious features of the near and immediate sources from which he had composed that vision—the simultaneous presence of derivation and originality.

Whatever its flaws, such a laborious compilation of an important artist's life work as *The Paintings of Arshile Gorky* confers a special distinction on its author which no quibbling review can remove. Just as Mozart's compositions are known by their Köchel listings, so will the paintings of Arshile Gorky—whether cited in exhibition catalogues, serious studies, or in museum inventories—be known by their "Jordan number." That is the real reward for what has clearly been a scholarly labor of love.

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Notebook

Calder's no-fault *Circus*

by Joseph Masheck

It still seems downright amazing that in today's economic climate one and a quarter million dollars could be raised in a mere fortnight, this May, to keep Alexander Calder's *The Circus* at the Whitney Museum of Art in New York. According to Mayor Koch—who is clearly no expert on Aristotle—it would have been a "tragedy" for *The Circus* to be "lost forever," especially to a foreign collection (Beaubourg perhaps?), but that was the threat. Earlier in the spring it had been announced that the sculpture, on loan to the Whitney since 1970, was to be sold by the Calder estate in order to meet tax obligations. In the end, half the money enabling the Whitney to buy the sculpture came from a foundation and the rest from some five hundred donors, the single nicest idea of the campaign being a Barnum & Bailey benefit performance.

Everybody likes circuses, right? So what's wrong with five hundred concerned citizens rallying to hold on to this harmless toy, this innocuous set of props for what might appear to be a trained-canary act? Perhaps the real question ought to be why something as artistically trivial as *The Circus,* especially when created by an artist who did do significant other work, should come to be invested with so much, let's say, *culturesqueness.*

Maybe there is something of a personality cult. True, even in his work, Alexander Calder seems to have been a nice guy, a good sport. But along with that you can find too a Main-Line appeal, a sort of artistic Know-Nothingism—all that emphatically traditionalist, all-American business about his having had a grandfather who made the statue of Benjamin Franklin on top of Philadelphia City Hall. Because this Beacon-Hill-at-the-Pops attitude still passes for democratic, it would be inappropriately "elitist" to maintain that Calder is the best that the adorers of the Wyeths can handle. So an occasion like the threat to *The Circus* becomes a kind of pep rally: join us or stay home like a grump. In fact, nobody's worldview is seriously at stake here, because *The Circus* is to the art of sculpture what, say, wind-chimes are to Zen. Hence, we are talking status quo.

Calder went to Paris in 1926, and well into the next decade he was still amusing important artists with his ongoing *Circus* project in what must have been genuinely entertaining *performances,* with the artist as ringmaster and Mrs. Calder as back-up. But how serious was all this, ever, even with Calder himself horsing around as part of the show?

That Calder was committed seriously to art is evident in his taking up abstraction after visiting Mondrian's studio in 1930. Imagine, though, what it must have been like to be Mondrian and to have this guy come in and actually say that the color rectangles on the wall would be really nifty if you could get them to sort of jiggle around. Two years later Marcel Duchamp drops in at Calder's studio and coins the term "mobile," apparently with his own 1913 *Bicycle Wheel* in mind. ("Mobile" might have implied a furnishing aspect

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as well: at the time *art mobilier* was the French term for a small portable prehistoric "household" sculpture.)

For Duchamp that would have been practically a throwaway idea; for Calder, something between a happy justification and a great gimmick. And the gimmick didn't end there. To go on to call Calder's later, nonkinetic sculptures "stabiles," as Arp supposedly did, is like *not* putting a goatee on the *Mona Lisa* (as Duchamp did in *L.H.O.O.Q.*) and calling it *L.H.O.O.Q. Shaved.* Duchamp had already finished his own long-term, more cerebrally playful project, *The Large Glass* (1915-23) by the time Calder started *The Circus.* If *The Circus* cost a million and a quarter, God knows how much Duchamp's *Large Glass* is worth. (A friend of mine suggests that museums could make a lot of inflationary money by occasionally arranging a sort of ransom auction to save a popular piece.)

It's not that there is anything at all scandalous in *The Circus* affair. The Whitney no doubt needs Calder's piece for the "gate" it can bring in, especially now that it's notorious; consequently, helping the museum to keep it is also helping the museum to keep the whole operation rolling, including its more important American art. If the sum in question were anything less than startlingly huge, it wouldn't even be polite to imply that anyone who was good enough to chip in to save a work of art might have been aesthetically mistaken. One only risks sounding like a spoilsport because there are much better games than this going on, and at nothing like these stakes (especially with the franc down). To put *The Circus* into some reasonable historical perspective, we have only to turn to Giacometti's *The Palace at 4 A.M.* (1932-33), another "model" sculpture and one comparable even in its materials. Calder's whole notion of "drawing in space," with wire, does have interest (witness the fine little head of E. Weyhe, still in that great bookstore), but anybody who really thinks so ought also by rights to be interested, today, in the sculptures of Patrick Ireland and Fred Sandback.

In the end the problem isn't that a work like *The Circus* is simply "too accessible" to take seriously, as critics often seem to say; it's that something offering so much *delectare* and so little *docere* is a moral cheat as art. As with nutrition, people deserve to have deficiencies pointed out, all taste aside. Just to think of what circus themes meant to Picasso (and Kandinsky, too) is to get a sense of the deficiency in the case at hand. This rightly bothers critics because the ordinary is embraced to the neglect of the extraordinary. Art like *The Circus* offers only the slightest resistance to thought and feeling: if you knew and cared, you could project onto it something like an analogy between its little mats and mini-tarps and some room-sized "installations" of the Minimalists. But it doesn't really matter if you know or care about that, and by itself the piece is not going to help. The point is not "accessibility" but density, sort of.

In a phrase in *The Birth of Tragedy* that is curiously suggestive of Duchamp, Nietzsche defends the artistic richness available in the best popular song, speaking of "the perpetually productive melody scattering picture sparks all around." With Calder's *Circus* in mind, one may think even more pointedly of the tightrope artist at the beginning of *Thus Spake Zarathustra,* whose true wonder, even *he* has to be told, comes from the consummate daring with which he has thrown himself into his seemingly absurd, futile, and unsuccessful performance. Here is Zarathustra, preaching down below: "What do they call that of which they are proud? They call it culture—with that they distinguish themselves from the goatherds. . . . They still work, for work is entertaining. But they are careful to keep their entertainment from being strenuous." Nietzsche subtitled *Zarathustra* "A Book for All and No One"; Calder's *Circus* amounts to art for all and no one, only without the challenge built into Nietzsche's formula.

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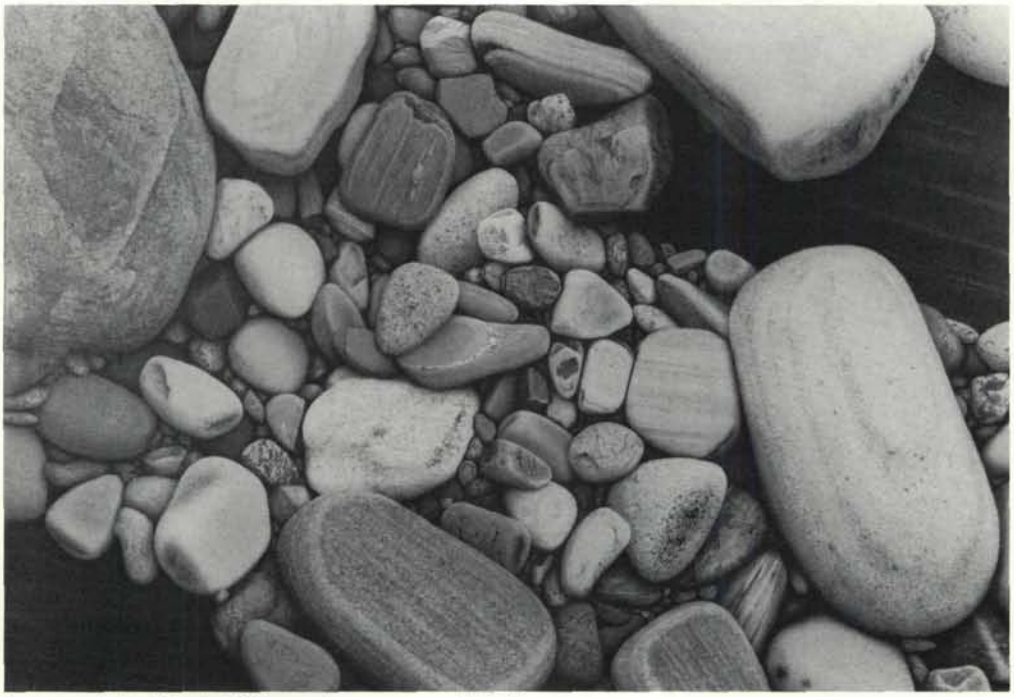

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